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THE COMPLETE WORKS  
OF  
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

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BONCHURCH EDITION

VOL. XIII

*The Bonchurch Edition of the Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, printed from type that has been distributed, is limited to 780 sets, numbered 1 to 780. Of these 750 are for sale.*



THE COMPLETE WORKS  
OF  
ALGERNON CHARLES  
SWINBURNE

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VICTOR MARIE HUGO

## VICTOR MARIE HUGO

1888

VICTOR MARIE HUGO, the great French poet, dramatist, and romance-writer, was born at Besançon on the 26th of February 1802. The all but still-born child was only kept alive and reared by the indefatigable devotion of his mother, a royalist of La Vendée married to a general in the service of Napoleon. Educated first in Spain and afterwards in France, the boy whose infancy had followed the fortunes of the imperial camp grew up a royalist and a Catholic. His first work in poetry and in fiction was devoted to the passionate proclamation of his faith in these principles. The precocious eloquence and ardour of these early works made him famous before his time. The odes which he published at the age of twenty, admirable for their spontaneous fervour and fluency, might have been merely the work of a marvellous boy; the ballads which followed them two years later revealed him as a great poet, a natural master of lyric and creative song. In 1823, at the age of twenty-one, he married his cousin Adèle Foucher. In the same year his first romance, *Han d'Islande*, was given to the press; his second, *Bug-Jargal*, appeared three years later. In 1827 he published the great dramatic poem of *Cromwell*, a masterpiece at all points except that of fitness for the modern stage. Two years afterwards he published *Les Orientales*, a volume of poems so various in style, so noble in spirit, so perfect in workmanship, in music, and in form, that they might alone suffice for the foundation of an immortal fame. In the course of nine years, from 1831 to 1840, he published *Les Feuilles d'Automne*,

effusions of religious royalism to the magnificent essay on Mirabeau which represents at once the historical opinion and the critical capacity of Victor Hugo at the age of thirty-two. Next year he published *Le Rhin*, a series of letters from Germany, brilliant and vivid beyond all comparison, containing one of the most splendid stories for children ever written, and followed by a political supplement rather pathetically unprophetic in its predictions.

At the age of thirty-eight he honoured the French Academy by taking his place among its members; the speech delivered on the occasion was characteristically generous in its tribute to an undeserving memory, and significantly enthusiastic in its glorification of Napoleon. Idolatry of his father's hero and leader had now superseded the earlier superstition inculcated by his mother. In 1846 his first speech in the chamber of peers—Louis Philippe's House of Lords—was delivered on behalf of Poland; his second, on the subject of coast defence, is memorable for the evidence it bears of careful research and practical suggestion. His pleading on behalf of the exiled family of Bonaparte induced Louis Philippe to cancel the sentence which excluded its members from France. After the fall and flight of the house of Orleans his parliamentary eloquence was never less generous in aim and always as fervent in its constancy to patriotic and progressive principle. When the conspiring forces of clerical venality and political prostitution had placed a putative Bonaparte in power attained by perjury after perjury, and supported by massacre after massacre, Victor Hugo, in common with all honourable men who had ever taken part in political or public life under the government superseded by force of treason and murder, was driven from his country into an exile of well-nigh twenty years.

Next year he published *Napoléon le Petit* ; twenty-five years afterwards *Histoire d'un Crime*. In these two books his experience and his opinion of the tactics which founded the second French Empire stand registered for all time. In the deathless volume of *Châtiments*, which appeared in 1853, his indignation, his genius, and his faith found such utterance and such expression as must recall to the student alternately the lyric inspiration of Coleridge and Shelley, the prophetic inspiration of Dante and Isaiah, the satiric inspiration of Juvenal and Dryden. Three years after *Les Châtiments*, a book written in lightning, appeared *Les Contemplations*, a book written in sunlight and starlight. Of the six parts into which it is divided, the first translates into many-sided music the joys and sorrows, the thoughts and fancies, the studies and ardours and speculations of youth ; the second, as full of light and colour, grows gradually deeper in tone of thought and music ; the third is yet riper and more various in form of melody and in fervour of meditation ; the fourth is the noblest of all tributes ever paid by song to sorrow—a series of poems consecrated to the memory of the poet's eldest daughter, who was drowned together with her husband by the upsetting of a boat off the coast of Normandy, a few months after their wedding-day, in 1843 ; the fifth and the sixth books, written during his first four years of exile (all but one noble poem which bears date nine years earlier than its epilogue or postscript), contain more than a few poems unsurpassed and unsurpassable for depth and clarity and trenchancy of thought, for sublimity of inspiration, for intensity of faith, for loyalty in translation from nature, and for tenderness in devotion to truth ; crowned and glorified and completed by their matchless dedication to the dead.

Three years later again, in 1859, Victor Hugo gave

to the world the first instalment of the greatest book published in the nineteenth century, *La Légende des Siècles*. Opening with a vision of Eve in Paradise which eclipses Milton's in beauty no less than in sublimity—a dream of the mother of mankind at the hour when she knew the first sense of dawning motherhood—it closes with a vision of the trumpet to be sounded on the day of judgment which transcends the imagination of Dante by right of a realised idea which was utterly impossible of conception to a believer in Dante's creed: the idea of real and final equity; the concept of absolute and abstract righteousness. Between this opening and this close the pageant of history and of legend, marshalled and vivified by the will and the hand of the poet, ranges through an infinite variety of action and passion, of light and darkness, of terror and pity, of lyric rapture and of tragic triumph.

After yet another three years' space the author of *La Légende des Siècles* reappeared as the author of *Les Misérables*, the greatest epic and dramatic work of fiction ever created or conceived: the epic of a soul transfigured and redeemed, purified by heroism and glorified through suffering; the tragedy and the comedy of life at its darkest and its brightest, of humanity at its best and at its worst. Two years afterwards the greatest man born since the death of Shakespeare paid homage to the greatest of his predecessors in a volume of magnificent and discursive eloquence which bore the title *William Shakespeare*, and might, as its author admitted and suggested, more properly have been entitled *A propos de Shakespeare*. It was undertaken with the simple design of furnishing a preface to his younger son's translation of Shakespeare; a monument of perfect scholarship, of indefatigable devotion, and of literary genius, which eclipses even Urquhart's Rabelais



—its only possible competitor ; and to which the translator's father prefixed a brief and admirable note of introduction in the year after the publication of the volume which had grown under his hand into the bulk and the magnificence of an epic poem in prose. In the same year *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois* gave evidence of new power and fresh variety in the exercise and display of an unequalled skill and a subtle simplicity of metre and of style employed on the everlasting theme of lyric and idyllic fancy, and touched now and then with a fire more sublime than that of youth and love.

Next year the exile of Guernsey published his third great romance, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*, a work unsurpassed even among the works of its author for splendour of imagination and of style, for pathos and sublimity of truth. Three years afterwards the same theme was rehandled with no less magnificent mastery in *L'Homme qui Rit* ; the theme of human heroism confronted with the superhuman tyranny of blind and unimaginable chance, overpowered and unbroken, defeated and invincible. Between the dates of these two great books appeared *La Voix de Guernesey*, a noble and terrible poem on the massacre of Mentana which branded and commemorated for ever the papal and imperial infamy of the colleagues in that crime.

In 1872 Victor Hugo published in imperishable verse his record of the year which followed the collapse of the empire, *L'Année Terrible*. All the poet and all the man spoke out and stood evident in the perfervid patriotism, the filial devotion, the fatherly tenderness, the indignation and the pity, which here find alternate expression in passionate and familiar and majestic song. In 1874 he published his last great romance, the tragic and

historic poem in prose called *Quatrevingt-treize* ; a work as rich in thought, in tenderness, in wisdom and in humour and in pathos, as ever was cast into the mould of poetry or of fiction. The introduction to his first volume of *Actes et Paroles*, ranging in date from 1841 to 1851, is dated in June 1875 ; it is one of his most earnest and most eloquent appeals to the conscience and intelligence of the student. The second volume contains the record of his deeds and words during the years of his exile ; like the first and the third, it is headed by a memorable preface, as well worth the reverent study of those who may dissent from some of the writer's views as of those who may assent to all. The third and fourth volumes preserve the register of his deeds and words from 1870 to 1885 ; they contain, among other things memorable, the nobly reticent and pathetic tribute to the memory of the two sons he had lost since their common return from exile. In 1877 appeared the second series of *La Légende des Siècles* ; and in the same year the author of that colossal work, treating no less of superhuman than of human things, gave us the loveliest and most various book of song on the loveliest and simplest of subjects ever given to man, *L'Art d'être Grandpère*. Next year he published *Le Pape*, a vision of the spirit of Christ in appeal against the spirit of Christianity, His ideal follower confronted and contrasted with His nominal vicar ; next year again *La Pitié Suprême*, a plea for charity towards tyrants who know not what they do, perverted by omnipotence and degraded by adoration ; two years later *Religions et Religion*, a poem which is at once a cry of faith and a protest against the creeds which deform and distort and leave it misshapen and envenomed and defiled ; and in the same year *L'Ane*, a pæan of satiric invective against the past follies of learned ignorance, and lyric

rapture of confidence in the future wisdom and the final conscience of the world.

These four great poems, one in sublimity of spirit and in supremacy of style, were succeeded next year by a fourfold gift of even greater price, *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit* : the first book, that of satire, is as full of fiery truth and radiant reason as any of his previous work in that passionate and awful kind ; the second or dramatic book is as full of fresh life and living nature, of tragic humour and of mortal pathos, as any other work of the one great modern dramatist's ; the third or lyric book would suffice to reveal its author as incomparably and immeasurably the greatest poet of his age, and one great among the greatest of all time ; the fourth or epic book is the sublimest and most terrible of historic poems—a visionary pageant of French history from the reign and the revelries of Henry IV. to the reign and the execution of Louis XVI. Next year the great tragic poem of *Torquemada* came forth to bear witness that the hand which wrote *Ruy Blas* had lost nothing of its godlike power and its matchless cunning, if the author of *Le Roi s'amuse* had ceased to care much about coherence of construction from the theatrical point of view as compared with the perfection of a tragedy designed for the devotion of students not unworthy or incapable of the study ; that his command of pity and terror, his powers of intuition and invention, had never been more absolute and more sublime ; and that his infinite and illimitable charity of imagination could transfigure even the most monstrous historic representative of Christian or Catholic diabolatry into the likeness of a terribly benevolent and a tragically magnificent monomaniac. Two years later Victor Hugo published the third and concluding series of *La Légende des Siècles*. On the 22nd of May 1885 he died.

The first volume published of his posthumous works was the exquisite and splendid *Théâtre en Liberté*, a sequence if not a symphony of seven poems in dramatic form, tragic or comic or fanciful eclogues, incomparable with the work of any other man but the author of *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* in combination and alternation of gayer and of graver harmonies. The unfinished poems, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, are full to overflowing of such magnificent work, such wise simplicity of noble thought, such heroic and pathetic imagination, such reverent and daring faith, as no other poet has ever cast into deathless words and set to deathless music. *Les Jumeaux*, an unfinished tragedy, would possibly have been the very greatest of his works if it had been completed on the same scale and on the same lines as it was begun and carried forward to a point at which it was cut short for ever. His reminiscences of *Things Seen* in the course of a strangely varied experience, and his notes of travel among the Alps and Pyrenees, in the north of France and in Belgium, in the south of France and in Burgundy, are all recorded by such a pen and registered by such a memory as no other man ever had at the service of his impressions or his thoughts. *Toute la Lyre*, his latest legacy to the world, would be enough, though no other evidence were left, to show that the author was one of the very greatest among poets and among men : unsurpassed in sublimity of spirit, in spontaneity of utterance, in variety of power, and in perfection of workmanship ; infinite and profound beyond all reach of praise at once in thought and in sympathy, in perception and in passion ; master of all the simplest as of all the subtlest melodies or symphonies of song that ever found expression in a Border ballad or a Pythian ode.

## THE WORK OF VICTOR HUGO

IN the spring of 1616 the greatest Englishman of all time passed away with no public homage or notice, and the first tributes paid to his memory were prefixed to the miserably garbled and inaccurate edition of his works which was issued seven years later by a brace of players under the patronage of a brace of peers. In the spring of 1885 the greatest Frenchman of all time has passed away amid such universal anguish and passion of regret as never before accompanied the death of the greatest among poets. The contrast is of course not wholly due to the incalculable progress of humanity during the two hundred and sixty-nine years which divide the date of our mourning from the date of Shakespeare's death : nor even to the vast superiority of Frenchmen to Englishmen in the quality of generous, just, and reasonable gratitude for the very highest of all benefits that man can confer on mankind. For the greatest poet of this century has been more than such a force of indirect and gradual beneficence as every great writer must needs be. His spiritual service has been in its inmost essence, in its highest development, the service of a healer and a comforter, the work of a redeemer and a prophet. Above all other apostles who have brought us each the glad tidings of his peculiar gospel, the free gifts of his special inspiration, has this one deserved to be called by the most beautiful and tender of all human titles—the son of consolation. His burning wrath and scorn unquenchable were fed with light and heat from the inexhaustible dayspring of his

love—a fountain of everlasting and unconsuming fire. We know of no such great poet so good, of no such good man so great in genius : not though Milton and Shelley, our greatest lyric singer and our single epic poet, remain with us for signs and examples of devotion as heroic and self-sacrifice as pure. And therefore it is but simply reasonable that not those alone should mourn for him who have been reared and nurtured on the fruits of his creative spirit ; that those also whom he wrought and fought for, but who know him only as their champion and their friend—they that cannot even read him, but remember how he laboured in their cause, that their children might fare otherwise than they—should bear no unequal part in the burden of this infinite and worldwide sorrow.

For us, who from childhood upwards have fostered and fortified whatever of good was born in us—all capacity of spiritual work, all seed of human sympathy, all powers of hope and faith, all passions and aspirations found loyal to the service of duty and of love—with the bread of his deathless word and the wine of his immortal song, the one thing possible to do in this first hour of bitterness and stupefaction at the sense of a loss not possible yet to realise is not to declaim his praise or parade our lamentation in modulated effects or efforts of panegyric or of dirge : it is to reckon up once more the standing account of our all but incalculable debt. A brief and simple summary of his published works may probably lay before the student some points and some details not generally familiar to the run of English readers : and I know not what better service might be done them than to bring into their sight such aspects of the most multiform and many-sided genius that ever wrought in prose or verse as are least obvious and least notorious to the foreign world of letters.

Poet, dramatist, novelist, historian, philosopher, and patriot, the spiritual sovereign of the nineteenth century was before all things and above all things a poet. Throughout all the various and ambitious attempts of his marvellous boyhood—criticism, drama, satire, elegy, epigram, and romance—the dominant vein is poetic. His example will stand for ever as the crowning disproof of the doubtless more than plausible opinion that the most amazing precocity of power is a sign of ensuing impotence and premature decay. There was never a more brilliant boy than Victor Hugo : but there has never been a greater man. At any other than a time of mourning it might be neither unseasonable nor unprofitable to observe that the boy's early verse, moulded on the models of the eighteenth century, is an arsenal of satire on revolutionary principles or notions which might suffice to furnish forth with more than their natural equipment of epigram a whole army of reactionary rhymesters and pamphleteers. But from the first, without knowing it, he was on the road to Damascus : if not to be struck down by sudden miracle, yet by no less inevitable a process to undergo a no less unquestionable conversion. At sixteen he wrote for a wager in the space of a fortnight the chivalrous and heroic story of *Bug-Jargal* ; afterwards recast and reinforced with fresh vigour of vitality, when the author had attained the maturer age of twenty-three. His tenderness and manliness of spirit were here made nobly manifest : his originality and ardour of imagination, wild as yet and crude and violent, found vent two years later in *Han d'Islande*. But no boyish work on record ever showed more singular force of hand, more brilliant variety of power : though the author's criticism ten years later admits that ' il n'y a dans *Han d'Islande* qu'une chose sentie, l'amour du jeune homme ; qu'une

chose observée, l'amour de la jeune fille.' But as the work of a boy's fancy or invention, touched here and there with genuine humour, terror, and pathos, it is not less wonderful than are the author's first odes for ease and force and freshness and fluency of verse imbued with simple and sincere feeling, with cordial and candid faith. And in both these boyish stories the hand of a soldier's son, a child of the camp, reared in the lap of war and cradled in traditions of daring, is evident whenever an episode of martial adventure comes in among the more fantastic excursions of adolescent inventiveness. But it is in the ballads written between his twenty-second and his twenty-seventh year that Victor Hugo first showed himself, beyond all question and above all cavil, an original and a great poet. *La Chasse du Burgrave* and *Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean* would suffice of themselves to establish that. The fire, the music, the force, the tenderness, the spirit of these glorious little poems must needs, one would think, impress even such readers as might be impervious to the charm of their exquisitely vigorous and dexterous execution. Take for example this one stanza from the ballad last mentioned :—

La cohue,  
Flot de fer,  
Frappe, hue,  
Remplit l'air,

Et, profonde,  
'Tourne et gronde  
Comme une onde  
Sur la mer.

It will of course, I should hope, be understood once for all that when I venture to select for special mention any special poem of Hugo's I do not dream of venturing



to suggest that others are not or may not be fully as worthy of homage, or that anything of this incomparable master's work will not require our study or does not demand our admiration ; I do but take leave to indicate in passing some of those which have been to me especially fruitful of enduring delight, and still are cherished in consequence with a peculiar gratitude.

At twenty-five the already celebrated lyric poet published his magnificent historic drama of *Cromwell* : a work sufficient of itself to establish the author's fame for all ages in which poetry and thought, passion and humour, subtle truth of character, stately perfection of structure, facile force of dialogue and splendid eloquence of style, continue to be admired and enjoyed. That the author has apparently confounded one earl of Rochester with another more famous bearer of the same title must not be allowed to interfere with the credit due to him for wide and various research. Any dullard can point the finger at a slip here and there in the history, a change or an error of detail or of date : it needs more care to appreciate the painstaking and ardent industry which has collected and fused together a great mass of historic and legendary material, the fervent energy of inspiration which has given life, order, and harmony to the vast and versatile design. As to the executive part of the poem, the least that can be said by any competent judge of that matter is that Molière was already equalled and Corneille was already excelled in their respective provinces of verse by the young conqueror whose rule was equal and imperial over every realm of song. The comic interludes or episodes of the second and third acts, so admirably welded into the structure or woven into the thread of the action, would suffice to prove this when collated with the seventeenth scene of

Chacun de ces fleurons cache une ardente épine  
 La couronne les tue ; un noir souci les mine ;  
 Elle change en tyran le mortel le plus doux,  
 Et, pesant sur le roi, le fait peser sur tous.  
 Le peuple les admire, et, s'abdi quant lui-même,  
 Compte tous les rubis dont luit le diadème ;  
 Mais comme il fré mirait pour eux de leur fardeau,  
 S'il regardait le front et non pas le bandeau !  
 Eux, leur charge les trouble, et leurs mains souveraines  
 De l'état chancelant mêlent bientôt les rênes.—  
 Ah ! remportez ce signe exécrable, odieux !  
 Ce bandeau trop souvent tombe du front aux yeux.—

(*Larmoyant.*)

Et qu'en ferais-je enfin ? Mal né pour la puissance,  
 Je suis simple de cœur et vis dans l'innocence.  
 Si j'ai, la fronde en main, veillé sur le bercail,  
 Si j'ai devant l'écueil pris place au gouvernail,  
 J'ai dû me dévouer pour la cause commune.  
 Mais que n'ai-je vieilli dans mon humble fortune !  
 Que n'ai-je vu tomber les tyrans aux abois,  
 A l'ombre de mon chaume et de mon petit bois !  
 Hélas ! j'eusse aimé mieux ces champs où l'on respire,  
 Le ciel m'en est témoin, que les soins de l'empire ;  
 Et Cromwell eût trouvé plus de charme cent fois  
 A garder ses moutons qu'à détrôner des rois !

(*Pleurant.*)

Que parle-t-on de sceptre ? Ah ! j'ai manqué ma vie.  
 Ce morceau de clinquant n'a rien qui me convie.  
 Ayez pitié de moi, frères, loin d'envier  
 Votre vieux général, votre vieil Olivier.  
 Je sens mon bras faiblir, et ma fin est prochaine.  
 Depuis assez longtemps suis-je pas à la chaîne ?  
 Je suis vieux, je suis las ; je demande merci.  
 N'est-il pas temps qu'enfin je me repose aussi ?  
 Chaque jour j'en appelle à la bonté divine,  
 Et devant le Seigneur je frappe ma poitrine.  
 Que je veuille être roi ! Si frère et tant d'orgueil !  
 Ce projet, et j'en jure à côté du cercueil,  
 Il m'est plus étranger, frères, que la lumière  
 Du soleil à l'enfant dans le sein de sa mère !  
 Loin ce nouveau pouvoir à mes vœux présenté !  
 Je n'en accepte rien,—rien que l'hérédité.

The subtlety and variety of power displayed in the treatment of the chief character should be evident alike to those who look only on the upright side of it and those who can see only its more oblique aspect. The Cromwell of Hugo is as far from the faultless monster of Carlyle's creation and adoration as from the all but unredeemed villain of royalist and Hibernian tradition : he is a great and terrible poetic figure, imbued throughout with active life and harmonised throughout by imaginative intuition : a patriot and a tyrant, a dissembler and a believer, a practical humorist and a national hero.

The famous preface in which the batteries of pseudo-classic tradition were stormed and shattered at a charge has itself long since become a classic. That the greatest poet was also the greatest prose-writer of his generation there could no longer be any doubt among men of any intelligence : but not even yet was more than half the greatness of his multitudinous force revealed. Two years later, at the age of twenty-seven, he published the superb and entrancing *Orientales* : the most musical and many-coloured volume of verse that ever had glorified the language. From *Le Feu du Ciel* to *Sara la Baigneuse*, from the thunder-peals of exterminating judgment to the flute-notes of innocent girlish luxury in the sense of loveliness and life, the inexhaustible range of his triumph expands and culminates and extends. Shelley has left us no more exquisite and miraculous piece of lyrical craftsmanship than *Les Djinns* ; none perhaps so rich in variety of modulation, so perfect in rise and growth and relapse and reiteration of music :—

Murs, ville,  
Et port,  
Asile  
De mort,

## A STUDY OF VICTOR HUGO

Mer grise  
Où brise  
La brise,  
Tout dort.

Dans la plaine  
Naît un bruit.  
C'est l'haleine  
De la nuit.  
Elle brame  
Comme une âme  
Qu'une flamme  
Toujours suit.

Then the terrible music of the flight of evil spirits—  
'troupeau lourd et rapide'—grows as it were note by  
note and minute by minute up to its full height of  
tempest, and again relapses and recedes into the sub-  
siding whisper of the corresponsive close :—

Ce bruit vague  
Qui s'endort,  
C'est la vague  
Sur le bord ;  
C'est la plainte  
Presque éteinte  
D'une sainte  
Pour un mort.

On doute  
La nuit . . .  
J'écoute :—  
Tout fuit,  
Tout passe ;  
L'espace  
Efface  
Le bruit.

And here, like Shelley, was Hugo already the poet of  
freedom, a champion of the sacred right and the holy  
duty of resistance. The husk of a royalist education,  
the crust of reactionary misconceptions, had already

begun to drop off : not yet a pure republican, he was now ripe to receive and to understand the doctrine of human right, the conception of the common weal, as distinguished from imaginary duties and opposed to hereditary claims.

The twenty-eighth year of his life, which was illuminated by the issue of these passionate and radiant poems, witnessed also the opening of his generous and lifelong campaign or crusade against the principle of capital punishment. With all possible reverence and all possible reluctance, but remembering that without perfect straightforwardness and absolute sincerity I should be even unworthier than I am to speak of Victor Hugo at all, I must say that his reasoning on this subject seems to me insufficient and inconclusive : that his own radical principle, the absolute inviolability of human life, the absolute sinfulness of retributive bloodshedding, if not utterly illogical and untenable, is tenable or logical only on the ground assumed by those quaintest though not least pathetic among fanatics and heroes, the early disciples of George Fox. If a man tells you that supernatural revelation has forbidden him to take another man's life under all and any circumstances, he is above or beyond refutation : if he says that self-defence is justifiable, and that righteous warfare is a patriotic duty, but that to exact from the very worst of murderers, a parricide or a poisoner, a Philip the Second or a Napoleon the Third, the payment of a life for a life—or even of one infamous existence for whole hecatombs of innocent lives—is an offence against civilisation and a sin against humanity, I am not merely unable to accept but incompetent to understand his argument. We may most heartily agree with him that France is degraded by the guillotine, and that England is disgraced by the gallows, and yet our abhorrence of these

barbarous and nauseous brutalities may not preclude us from feeling that a dealer (for example) in professional infanticide by starvation might very properly be subjected to vivisection without anæsthetics, and that all manly and womanly minds not distorted or distracted by prepossessions or assumptions might rationally and laudably rejoice in the prospect of this legal and equitable process. 'The senseless old law of retaliation' (*la vieille et inepte loi du talion*) is inept or senseless only when the application of it is false to the principle: when justice in theory becomes unjust in practice. Another stale old principle or proverb—'abusus non tollit usum'—suffices to confute some of the arguments—I am very far from saying, all—adduced or alleged by the ardent eloquence of Victor Hugo in his admirable masterpiece of terrible and pathetic invention, *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*, and subsequently in the impressive little history of *Claude Gueux*, in the famous speech on behalf of Charles Hugo when impeached on a charge of insult to the laws in an article on the punishment of death, and in the fervent eloquence of his appeal on the case of a criminal executed in Guernsey, and of his protest addressed to Lord Palmerston against the horrible result of its rejection. That certain surviving methods of execution are execrable scandals to the country which maintains them, he has proved beyond all humane or reasonable question: and that all murderers are not alike inexcusable is no less indisputable a proposition: but beyond these two points the most earnest and exuberant advocacy can advance nothing likely to convince any but those already converted to the principle that human life must never be taken in punishment of crime—that there are not criminals whose existence insults humanity, and cries aloud on justice for mercy's very sake to cut it off.

The next year (1830) is famous for ever beyond all others in the history of French literature : it was the year of *Hernani*, the date of liberation and transfiguration for the tragic stage of France. The battle which raged round the first acted play of Hugo's and the triumph which crowned the struggles of its champions, are not these things written in too many chronicles to be for the thousandth time related here ? And of its dramatic and poetic quality what praise could be uttered that must not before this have been repeated at least some myriads of times ? But if there be any mortal to whom the heroic scene of the portraits, the majestic and august monologue of Charles the Fifth at the tomb of Charles the Great, the terrible beauty, the vivid pathos, the bitter sweetness of the close, convey no sense of genius and utter no message of delight, we can only say that it would simply be natural, consistent, and proper for such a critic to recognise in Shakespeare a barbarian, and a Philistine in Milton.

Nevertheless, if we are to obey the perhaps rather childish impulse of preference and selection among the highest works of the highest among poets, I will avow that to my personal instinct or apprehension *Marion de Lorme* seems a yet more perfect and pathetic masterpiece than even *Hernani* itself. The always generous and loyal Dumas placed it at the very head of his friend's dramatic works. Written, as most readers (I presume) will remember, before its predecessor on the stage, it was prohibited on the insanely fatuous pretext that the presentation of King Louis the Thirteenth was an indirect affront to the majesty of King Charles the Tenth. After that luckless dotard had been driven off his throne, it was at once proposed to produce the hitherto interdicted play before an audience yet palpitating with the thrill of revolution and resentment.

But the chivalrous loyalty of Victor Hugo refused to accept a facile and factitious triumph at the expense of an exiled old man, over the ruins of a shattered old cause. The play was not permitted by its author to enter till the spring of the following year on its inevitable course of glory. It is a curious and memorable fact that the most tender-hearted of all great poets had originally made the hero of this tragedy leave the heroine unforgiven for the momentary and reluctant relapse into shame by which she had endeavoured to repurchase his forfeited life ; and that Prosper Mérimée should have been the first, Marie Dorval the second, to reclaim a little mercy for the penitent. It is to their pleading that we owe the sublime pathos of the final parting between Marion and Didier.

In one point it seems to me that this immortal masterpiece may perhaps be reasonably placed, with *Le Roi s'amuse* and *Ruy Blas*, in triune supremacy at the head of Victor Hugo's plays. The wide range of poetic abilities, the harmonious variety of congregated powers, displayed in these three great tragedies through almost infinite variations of terror and pity and humour and sublime surprise, will seem to some readers, whose reverence is no less grateful for other gifts of the same great hand, unequalled at least till the advent in his eighty-first year of *Torquemada*.

Victor Hugo was not yet thirty when all these triumphs lay behind him. In the twenty-ninth year of a life which would seem fabulous and incredible in the record of its achievements if divided by lapse of time from all possible proof of its possibility by the attestation of dates and facts, he published in February *Notre-Dame de Paris*, in November *Les Feuilles d'Automne* : that the two dreariest months of the year might not only 'smell April and May,' but outshine July and August.



The greatest of all tragic romances has a Grecian perfection of structure, with a Gothic intensity of pathos. To attempt the praise of such a work would be only less idle than to refuse it. Terror and pity, with eternal fate for keynote to the strain of story, never struck deeper to men's hearts through more faultless evolution of combining circumstance on the tragic stage of Athens. Louis the Eleventh has been painted by many famous hands, but Hugo's presentation of him, as compared for example with Scott's, is as a portrait by Velasquez to a portrait by Vandyke. The style was a new revelation of the supreme capacities of human speech : the touch of it on any subject of description or of passion is as the touch of the sun for penetrating irradiation and vivid evocation of life.

From the *Autumn Leaves* to the *Songs of the Twilight*, and again from the *Inner Voices* to the *Sunbeams and Shadows*, the continuous jet of lyric song through a space of ten fertile years was so rich in serene and various beauty that the one thing notable in a flying review of its radiant course is the general equality of loveliness in form and colour, which is relieved and heightened at intervals by some especial example of a beauty more profound or more sublime. The first volume of the four, if I mistake not, won a more immediate and universal homage than the rest : its unsurpassed melody was so often the raiment of emotion which struck home to all hearts a sense of domestic tenderness too pure and sweet and simple for perfect expression by any less absolute and omnipotent lord of style, that it is no wonder if in many minds—many mothers' minds especially—there should at once have sprung up an all but ineradicable conviction that no subsequent verse must be allowed to equal or excel the volume which contained such flowerlike jewels of song

as the nineteenth and twentieth of these unwithering and imperishable *Leaves*. But no error possible to a rational creature could be more serious or more complete than the assumption of any inferiority in the volume containing the two glorious poems addressed to Admiral Canaris, the friend (may I be forgiven the filial vanity or egotism which impels me to record it ?) of the present writer's father in his youth ; the two first in date of Hugo's finest satires, the lines that scourge a backbiter and the lines that brand a traitor (the resonant and radiant indignation of the latter stands unsurpassed in the very *Châtiments* themselves) ; the two most enchanting aubades or songs of sunrise that ever had outsung the birds and outsweetened the flowers of the dawn ; and—for here I can cite no more—the closing tribute of lines more bright than the lilies whose name they bear, offered by a husband's love at the sweet still shrine of motherhood and wifeness. The first two stanzas of the second aubade are all that can here be quoted :—

L'aurore s'allume,  
L'ombre épaisse fuit ;  
Le rêve et la brume  
Vont où va la nuit ;  
Paupières et roses  
S'ouvrent demi-closes ;  
Du réveil des choses  
On entend le bruit.

Tout chante et murmure,  
Tout parle à la fois,  
Fumée et verdure,  
Les nids et les toits ;  
Le vent parle aux chênes,  
L'eau parle aux fontaines  
Toutes les haleines  
Deviennent des voix.

And in each of the two succeeding volumes there is, among all their other things of price, a lyric which may even yet be ranked with the highest subsequent work of its author for purity of perfection, for height and fullness of note, for music and movement and informing spirit of life. We ought to have in English, but I fear—or rather I am only too sure—we have not, a song in which the sound of the sea is rendered as in that translation of the trumpet-blast of the night-wind, with all its wails and pauses and fluctuations and returns, done for once into human speech and interpreted into spiritual sense for ever. For instinctive mastery of its means and absolute attainment of its end, for majesty of living music and fidelity of sensitive imagination, there is no lyric poem in any language more wonderful or more delightful :—

UNE NUIT QU'ON ENTENDAIT LA MER  
SANS LA VOIR

Quels sont ces bruits sourds ?  
Ecoutez vers l'onde  
Cette voix profonde  
Qui pleure toujours  
Et qui toujours gronde,  
Quoiqu'un son plus clair  
Parfois l'interrompe . . .—  
Le vent de la mer  
Souffle dans sa trompe.

Comme il pleut ce soir !  
N'est-ce pas, mon hôte ?  
Là-bas, à la côte,  
Le ciel est bien noir,  
La mer est bien haute !  
On dirait l'hiver ;  
Parfois on s'y trompe . . .—  
Le vent de la mer  
Souffle dans sa trompe.

## A STUDY OF VICTOR HUGO

Oh ! marins perdus !  
 Au loin, dans cette ombre,  
 Sur la nef qui sombre,  
 Que de bras tendus  
 Vers la terre sombre !  
 Pas d'ancre de fer  
 Que le flot ne rompe.—  
 Le vent de la mer  
 Souffle dans sa trompe.

Nochers imprudents !  
 Le vent dans la voile  
 Déchire la toile  
 Comme avec les dents !  
 Là-haut pas d'étoile !  
 L'un lutte avec l'air,  
 L'autre est à la pompe.—  
 Le vent de la mer  
 Souffle dans sa trompe.

C'est toi, c'est ton feu  
 Que le nocher rêve,  
 Quand le flot s'élève,  
 Chandelier que Dieu  
 Pose sur la grève,  
 Phare au rouge éclair  
 Que la brume estompe !—  
 Le vent de la mer  
 Souffle dans sa trompe.

A yet sweeter and sadder and more magical sea-song there was yet to come years after—but only from the lips of an exile. Of the ballad—so to call it, if any term of definition may suffice—which stands out as a crowning splendour among *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, not even Hugo's own eloquence, had it been the work (which is impossible) of any other great poet in all time, could have said anything adequate at all. Not even Coleridge and Shelley, the sole twin sovereigns of English lyric

poetry, could have produced this little piece of lyric work by combination and by fusion of their gifts. The pathetic truthfulness and the simple manfulness of the mountain shepherd's distraction and devotion might have been given in ruder phrase and tentative rendering by the nameless ballad-makers of the border : but here is a poem which unites something of the charm of *Clerk Saunders* and *The Wife of Usher's Well* with something of the magic of *Christabel* and the *Ode to the West Wind* : a thing, no doubt, impossible ; but none the less obviously accomplished.<sup>1</sup>

The lyric work of these years would have been enough for the energy of another man, for the glory of another poet ; it was but a part, it was (I had wellnigh said) the lesser part, of its author's labours—if labour be not an improper term for the successive or simultaneous expressions or effusions of his indefatigable spirit. The

<sup>1</sup> In the winter of the year which in spring had seen *Les Rayons et les Ombres* come forth to kindle and refresh the hearts of readers, Victor Hugo published an ode in the same key as those *To the Column* and *To the Arch of Triumph*, on the return and reinterment of the dead Napoleon. Full of noble feeling and sonorous eloquence, the place of this poem in any collection of its author's works is distinctly and unmistakably marked out by every quality it has and by every quality it wants. In style and in sentiment, in opinion and in rhythm, it is one with the national and political poems which had already been published by the author since the date of his *Orientales* : in other words, it is in every possible point utterly and absolutely unlike the poems long afterwards to be written by the author in exile. Its old place, therefore, in all former editions, at the end of the volume containing the poems previously published in the same year, is obviously the only right one, and rationally the only one possible. By what inexplicable and inconceivable caprice it has been promoted to a place, in the so-called *édition définitive*, on the mighty roll of the *Légende des Siècles*, at the head of the fourth volume of that crowning work of modern times, I am hopelessly and helplessly at a loss to conjecture. But, at all risk of impeachment on a charge of unbecoming presumption, I must and do here enter my most earnest and strenuous protest against the claim of an edition to be in any sense final and unalterable, which rejects from among the *Châtiments* the poem on the death of Saint-Arnaud and admits into the *Légende des Siècles* the poem on the reinterment of Napoleon.

year after *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les Feuilles d'Automne* appeared one of the great crowning tragedies of all time, *Le Roi s'amuse*. As the keynote of *Marion de Lorme* had been redemption by expiation, so the keynote of this play is expiation by retribution. The simplicity, originality, and straightforwardness of the terrible means through which this austere conception is worked out would give moral and dramatic value to a work less rich in the tenderest and sublimest poetry, less imbued with the purest fire of pathetic passion. After the magnificent pleading of the Marquis de Nangis in the preceding play, it must have seemed impossible that the poet should without a touch of repetition or reiteration be able again to confront a young king with an old servant, pour forth again the denunciation and appeal of a breaking heart, clothe again the haughtiness of honour, the loyalty of grief, the sanctity of indignation, in words that shine like lightning and verses that thunder like the sea. But the veteran interceding for a nephew's life is a less tragic figure than he who comes to ask account for a daughter's honour. Hugo never merely repeats himself: his miraculous fertility and force of utterance were not more indefatigable and inexhaustible than the fountains of thought and emotion which fed that eloquence with fire.

In the seventh scene of the fourth act of *Marion de Lorme*, an old warrior of the days of Henri Quatre comes to plead with the son of his old comrade in arms for the life of his heir, condemned to death as a duellist by the edict of Richelieu:—

LE MARQUIS DE NANGIS (*se relevant*).      Je dis  
    qu'il est bien temps que vous y songiez, sire ;  
 Que le cardinal-duc a de sombres projets,  
 Et qu'il boit le meilleur du sang de vos sujets.

Votre père Henri, de mémoire royale,  
N'eût pas ainsi livré sa noblesse loyale ;  
Il ne la frappait point sans y fort regarder ;  
Et, bien gardé par elle, il la savait garder.  
Il savait qu'on peut faire avec des gens d'épées  
Quelque chose de mieux que des têtes coupées ;  
Qu'ils sont bons à la guerre. Il ne l'ignorait point,  
Lui dont plus d'une balle a troué le pourpoint.  
Ce temps était le bon. J'en fus, et je l'honore.  
Un peu de seigneurie y palpitait encore.  
Jamais à des seigneurs un prêtre n'eût touché.  
On n'avait point alors de tête à bon marché.  
Sire ! en des jours mauvais comme ceux où nous sommes  
Croyez un vieux, gardez un peu de gentilshommes.  
Vous en aurez besoin peut-être à votre tour.  
Hélas ! vous gémirez peut-être quelque jour  
Que la place de Grève ait été si fêtée,  
Et que tant de seigneurs de bravoure indomptée,  
Vers qui se tourneront vos regrets envieux,  
Soient morts depuis longtemps qui ne seraient pas vieux !  
Car nous sommes tout chauds de la guerre civile,  
Et le tocsin d'hier gronde encor dans la ville.  
Soyez plus ménager des peines du bourreau.  
C'est lui qui doit garder son estoc au fourreau  
Non pas vous. D'échafauds montrez-vous économe.  
Craignez d'avoir un jour à pleurer tel brave homme,  
Tel vaillant de grand cœur, dont, à l'heure qu'il est,  
Le squelette blanchit aux chaînes d'un gibet !  
Sire ! le sang n'est pas une bonne rosée ;  
Nulle moisson ne vient sur la Grève arrosée,  
Et le peuple des rois évite le balcon,  
Quand aux dépens du Louvre on peuple Montfaucon.  
Meurent les courtisans, s'il faut que leur voix aille  
Vous amuser, pendant que le bourreau travaille !  
Cette voix des flatteurs qui dit que tout est bon,  
Qu'après tout on est fils d'Henri Quatre, et Bourbon,  
Si haute qu'elle soit, ne couvre pas sans peine  
Le bruit sourd qu'en tombant fait une tête humaine.  
Je vous en donne avis, ne jouez pas ce jeu,  
Roi, qui serez un jour face à face avec Dieu.  
Donc, je vous dis, avant que rien ne s'accomplisse,  
Qu'à tout prendre il vaut mieux un combat qu'un supplice,

Que ce n'est pas la joie et l'honneur des états  
 De voir plus de besogne aux bourreaux qu'aux soldats,  
 Que c'est un pasteur dur pour la France où vous êtes  
 Qu'un prêtre qui se paye une dime de têtes,  
 Et que cet homme illustre entre les inhumains  
 Qui touche à votre sceptre—a du sang à ses mains !

In the fifth scene of the first act of *Le Roi s'amuse*, an old nobleman whose life, forfeit on a charge of friendship or relationship with rebels, has been repurchased by his daughter from the king at the price of her honour, is insulted by the king's jester when he comes to speak with the king, and speaks thus, without a glance at the jester :

Une insulte de plus !—Vous, sire, écoutez-moi,  
 Comme vous le devez, puisque vous êtes roi !  
 Vous m'avez fait un jour mener pieds nus en Grève ;  
 Là, vous m'avez fait grâce, ainsi que dans un rêve,  
 Et je vous ai béni, ne sachant en effet  
 Ce qu'un roi cache au fond d'une grâce qu'il fait.  
 Or, vous aviez caché ma honte dans la mienne.—  
 Oui, sire, sans respect pour une race ancienne,  
 Pour le sang de Poitiers, noble depuis mille ans,  
 Tandis que, revenant de la Grève à pas lents,  
 Je priais dans mon cœur le Dieu de la victoire  
 Qu'il vous donnât mes jours de vie en jours de gloire,  
 Vous, François de Valois, le soir du même jour,  
 Sans crainte, sans pitié, sans pudeur, sans amour,  
 Dans votre lit, tombeau de la vertu des femmes,  
 Vous avez froidement, sous vos baisers infâmes,  
 Terni, flétri, souillé, déshonoré, brisé  
 Diane de Poitiers, comtesse de Brézé !  
 Quoi ! lorsque j'attendais l'arrêt qui me condamne,  
 Tu courais donc au Louvre, ô ma chaste Diane !  
 Et lui, ce roi sacré chevalier par Bayard,  
 Jeune homme auquel il faut des plaisirs de vieillard,  
 Pour quelques jours de plus dont Dieu seul sait le compte,  
 Ton père sous ses pieds, te marchandait ta honte,  
 Et cet affreux tréteau, chose horrible à penser !  
 Qu'un matin le bourreau vint en Grève dresser,  
 Avant la fin du jour devait être, ô misère !  
 Ou le lit de la fille, ou l'échafaud du père !



O Dieu ! qui nous jugez, qu'avez-vous dit là-haut,  
Quand vos regards ont vu, sur ce même échafaud,  
Se vautrer, triste et louche, et sanglante et souillée,  
La luxure royale en clémence habillée ?  
Sire ! en faisant cela, vous avez mal agi.  
Que du sang d'un vieillard le pavé fût rougi,  
C'était bien. Ce vieillard, peut-être respectable,  
Le méritait, étant de ceux du connétable.  
Mais que pour le vieillard vous ayez pris l'enfant,  
Que vous ayez broyé sous un pied triomphant  
La pauvre femme en pleurs, à s'effrayer trop prompte,  
C'est une chose impie, et dont vous rendrez compte !  
Vous avez dépassé votre droit d'un grand pas.  
Le père était à vous, mais la fille non pas.  
Ah ! vous m'avez fait grâce !—Ah ! vous nommez la chose  
Une grâce ! et je suis un ingrat, je suppose !  
—Sire, au lieu d'abuser ma fille, bien plutôt  
Que n'êtes-vous venu vous-même en mon cachot !  
Je vous aurais crié :—Faites-moi mourir ! grâce !  
Oh ! grâce pour ma fille, et grâce pour ma race !  
Oh ! faites-moi mourir ! la tombe, et non l'affront !  
Pas de tête plutôt qu'une souillure au front !  
Oh ! monseigneur le roi, puisqu'ainsi l'on vous nomme,  
Croyez-vous qu'un chrétien, un comte, un gentilhomme,  
Soit moins décapité, répondez, monseigneur,  
Quand au lieu de la tête il lui manque l'honneur ?  
—J'aurais dit cela, sire, et le soir, dans l'église,  
Dans mon cercueil sanglant baisant ma barbe grise,  
Ma Diane au cœur pur, ma fille au front sacré,  
Honorée, eût prié pour son père honoré !  
—Sire, je ne viens pas redemander ma fille.  
Quand on n'a plus d'honneur, on n'a plus de famille.  
Qu'elle vous aime ou non d'un amour insensé,  
Je n'ai rien à reprendre où la honte a passé.  
Gardez-la.—Seulement je me suis mis en tête  
De venir vous troubler ainsi dans chaque fête,  
Et jusqu'à ce qu'un père, un frère, ou quelque époux,  
—La chose arrivera,—nous ait vengés de vous,  
Pâle, à tous vos banquets, je reviendrai vous dire :  
—Vous avez mal agi, vous avez mal fait, sire !—  
Et vous m'écoutez, et votre front terni  
Ne se relèvera que quand j'aurai fini,

Vous voudrez, pour forcer ma vengeance à se taire,  
 Me rendre au bourreau. Non. Vous ne l'oserez faire,  
 De peur que ce ne soit mon spectre qui demain  
 (Montrant sa tête.)

Revienne vous parler,—cette tête à la main !

*Marion de Lorme* had been prohibited by Charles the Tenth for an imaginary reflection on Charles the Tenth; *Le Roi s'amuse* was prohibited by Louis-Philippe the First—and Last—for an imaginary reflection on Citizen Philippe Égalité. Victor Hugo vindicated his meaning and reclaimed his rights in a most eloquent, most manly, and most unanswerable speech before a tribunal which durst not and could not but refuse him justice. Early in the following year he brought out the first of his three tragedies in prose—in a prose which even the most loyal lovers of poetry, Théophile Gautier at their head, acknowledged on trial to be as good as verse. And assuredly it would be, if any prose ever could : which yet I must confess that I for one can never really feel to be possible. *Lucrèce Borgia*, the first-born of these three, is also the most perfect in structure as well as the most sublime in subject. The plots of all three are equally pure inventions of tragic fancy : Gennaro and Fabiano, the heroic son of the Borgia and the caitiff lover of the Tudor, are of course as utterly unknown to history as is the self-devotion of the actress Tisbe. It is more important to remark and more useful to remember that the mastery of terror and pity, the command of all passions and all powers that may subserve the purpose of tragedy, is equally triumphant and infallible in them all. *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie Tudor* appeared respectively in February and in November of the year 1833 ; *Angelo*, two years later ; and the year after this the exquisite and melodious libretto of *La Esmeralda*, which should be carefully and lovingly

studied by all who would appreciate the all but super-human versatility and dexterity of metrical accomplishment which would have sufficed to make a lesser poet famous among his peers for ever, but may almost escape notice in the splendour of Victor Hugo's other and sublimer qualities. In his thirty-seventh year all these blazed out once more together in the tragedy sometimes apparently rated as his master-work by judges whose verdict would on any such question be worthy at least of all considerate respect. No one that I know of has ever been absurd enough to make identity in tone of thought or feeling, in quality of spirit or of style, the ground for a comparison of Hugo with Shakespeare : they are of course as widely different as are their respective countries and their respective times : but never since the death of Shakespeare had there been so perfect and harmonious a fusion of the highest comedy with the deepest tragedy as in the five many-voiced and many-coloured acts of *Ruy Blas*.

At the age of forty Victor Hugo gave to the stage which for thirteen years had been glorified by his genius the last work he was ever to write for it. There may perhaps be other readers besides myself who take even more delight in *Les Burgraves* than in some of the preceding plays which had been more regular in action, more plausible in story, less open to the magnificent reproach of being too good for the stage—as the *Hamlet* which came finally from the recasting hand of Shakespeare was found to be, in the judgment even of Shakespeare's fellows ; too rich in lyric beauty, too superb in epic state. The previous year had seen the publication of the marvellously eloquent, copious, and vivid letters which gave to the world the impressions received by its greatest poet in a tour on the Rhine made five years earlier—that is, in the year

of *Ruy Blas*. In this book, as Gautier at once observed, the inspiration of *Les Burgraves* is evidently and easily traceable. Among numberless masterpieces of description, from which I have barely time to select for mention the view of Bishop Hatto's tower by the appropriately Dantesque light of a furnace at midnight—not as better than others, but as an example of the magic by which the writer imbues and impregnates observation and recollection with feeling and with fancy—the most enchanting legend of enchantment ever written for children of all ages, sweet and strange enough to have grown up among the fairy-tales of the past whose only known authors are the winds and suns of their various climates, lurks like a flower in a crevice of a crumbling fortress. The entrancing and haunting beauty of Régina's words as she watches the departing swallows—words which it may seem that any one might have said, but to which none other could have given the accent and the effect that Hugo has thrown into the simple sound of them—was as surely derived, we cannot but think, from some such milder and brighter vision of the remembered Rhineland solitudes, as were the sublime and all but Æschylean imprecations of Guanhumara from the impression of their darker and more savage memories or landscapes :—

OTBERT (*lui montrant la fenêtre*). Voyez ce beau soleil !

RÉGINA.

Oui, le couchant s'enflamme.

Nous sommes en automne et nous sommes au soir.

Partout la feuille tombe et le bois devient noir.

OTBERT. Les feuilles renaîtront.

RÉGINA.

Oui.

(*Rêvant et regardant le ciel*)

Vite ! à tire-d'ailes !—

—Oh ! c'est triste de voir s'enfuir les hirondelles !—

Elles s'en vont là-bas, vers le midi doré.

OTBERT. Elles reviendront.

RÉGINA.

Oui.—Mais moi je ne verrai

Ni l'oiseau revenir ni la feuille renaître !

Two years before the appearance of *Les Burgraves* Victor Hugo had begun his long and glorious career as an orator by a speech of characteristically generous enthusiasm, delivered on his reception into the Academy. The forgotten playwright and versifier whom he succeeded had been a professional if not a personal enemy : the one memorable thing about the man was his high-minded opposition to the tyranny of Napoleon, his own personal friend before the epoch of that tyranny began : and this was the point at once seized and dwelt on by the orator in a tone of earnest and cordial respect. The fiery and rapturous eloquence with which at the same time he celebrated the martial triumphs of the empire gave ample proof that he was now, as his father had prophesied that his mother's royalist boy would become when he grew to be a man, a convert to the views of that father, a distinguished though ill-requited soldier of the empire, and a faithful champion or mourner of its cause. The stage of Napoleonic hero-worship, single-minded and single-eyed if short-sighted and misdirected, through which Victor Hugo was still passing on towards the unseen prospect of a better faith, had been vividly illustrated and vehemently proclaimed in his letters on the Rhine, and was hereafter to be described with a fervent and pathetic fidelity in a famous chapter of *Les Misérables*. The same phase of patriotic prepossession inspired his no less generous tribute to the not very radiant memory of Casimir Delavigne, to whom he paid likewise the last and crowning honour of a funeral oration : an honour afterwards conferred on Frédéric Soulié, and far more deservedly bestowed

on Honoré de Balzac. More generous his first political speech in the chamber of peers could not be, but there was more of reason and justice in its fruitless appeal for more than barren sympathy, for a moral though not material intervention, on behalf of Poland in 1846. His second speech as a peer is an edifying commentary on the vulgar English view of his character as defective in all the practical and rational qualities of a politician, a statesman, or a patriot. The subject was the consolidation and defence of the French coast-line : a poet, of course, according to all reasonable tradition, if he ventured to open his unserviceable lips at all on such a grave matter of public business, ought to have remembered what was expected of him by the sagacity of blockheads, and carefully confined himself to the clouds, leaving facts to take care of themselves and proofs to hang floating in the air, while his vague and verbose declamation wandered at its own sweet will about and about the matter in hand, and never came close enough to grapple it. This, I regret to say, is exactly what the greatest poet of his age was inconsiderate enough to avoid, and most markedly to abstain from doing ; a course of conduct which can only be attributed to his notorious and deplorable love of paradox. His speech, though not wanting in eloquence of a reserved and masculine order, was wholly occupied with sedate and business-like exposition of facts and suggestion of remedies, grounded on experience and study of the question, and resulting in a proposal at once scientific and direct or such research as might result if possible in an arrest of the double danger with which the coast was threatened by the advance of the Atlantic and the Channel to a gradual obstruction of the great harbours and by the withdrawal or sub-

sidence of the Mediterranean from the seaports of the south ; finally, the orator urged upon his audience as a crowning necessity the creation of fresh harbours of refuge in dangerous and neglected parts of the coast ; insisting, with a simple and serious energy somewhat unlike the imaginary tone of the typical or traditional poet, on the plain fact that ninety-two ships had been lost on the same part of the coast within a space of seven years, which might have been saved by the existence of a harbour of refuge. To an Olympian or a Nephelococcygian intelligence such a paltry matter should have been even more indifferent than the claim of a family of exiles on the compassion of the country which had expelled them. To my own more humble and homely understanding it seems that there are not many more significant or memorable facts on record in the history of our age than this : that Victor Hugo was the advocate whose pleading brought back to France the banished race of which the future representative was for upwards of twenty years to keep him in banishment from France. On the evening of the same day on which the house of peers had listened to his speech in behalf of the Bonaparte family, Louis-Philippe, having taken cognisance of it, expressed his intention to authorise the return of the brood whose chief was hereafter to pick the pockets of his children. In the first fortnight of the following year the future author of the terrible *Vision of Dante* saluted in words full of noble and fervent reverence the apostle of Italian resurrection and Italian unity in the radiant figure of Pope Pius the Ninth. When the next month's revolution had flung Louis-Philippe from his throne, Victor Hugo declined to offer himself to the electors as a candidate for a seat in the assembly about to undertake the

charge of framing a constitution for the commonwealth ; but, if summoned by his fellow-citizens to take his share of this task, he expressed himself ready to discharge the duty so imposed on him with the disinterested self-devotion of which his whole future career was to give such continuous and such austere evidence. From the day on which sixty thousand voices summoned him to redeem this pledge, he never stinted nor slackened his efforts to fulfil the charge he had accepted in the closing words of a short, simple, and earnest address, in which he placed before his electors the contrasted likenesses of two different republics ; one, misnamed a commonweal, the rule of the red flag, of barbarism and blindness, communism and proscription and revenge ; the other a commonwealth indeed, in which all rights should be respected and no duties evaded or ignored ; a government of justice and mercy, of practicable principles and equitable freedom, of no iniquitous traditions and no utopian aims. To establish this kind of commonwealth and prevent the resurrection of the other, Hugo, at the age of forty-six, professed himself ready to devote his life. The work of thirty-seven years is now before all men's eyes for proof how well this promise has been kept. On dangerous questions of perverse or perverted socialism (June 20, 1848), on the freedom of the press, on the state of siege, its temporary necessity and its imminent abuse, on the encouragement of letters and the freedom of the stage, he spoke, in the course of a few months, with what seems to my poor understanding the most admirable good sense and temperance, the most perfect moderation and loyalty. I venture to dwell upon this division of Hugo's life and labours with as little wish of converting as I could have hope to convert that large



majority whose verdict has established as a law of nature the fact or the doctrine that 'every poet is a fool' when he meddles with practical politics; but not without a confidence grounded on no superficial study that the maintainers of this opinion, if they wish to cite in support of it the evidence supplied by Victor Hugo's political career, will do well to persevere in the course which I will do them the justice to admit that—as far as I know—they have always hitherto adopted; in other words, to assume the universal assent of all persons worth mentioning to the accuracy of this previous assumption, and dismiss with a quiet smile or an open sneer the impossible notion that any one but some single imbecile or eccentric can pretend to take seriously what seems to them ridiculous, or to think that ridiculous which to their wiser minds commends itself as serious. This beaten road of assumption, this well-worn highway of assertion, is as safe as well as a simple line of travel: and the practical person who keeps to it can well afford to dispense with argument as palpably superfluous, and with evidence as obviously impertinent. Should he so far forget that great principle of precaution as to diverge from it into the modest and simple course of investigation and comparison of theory with fact and probability with proof, his task may be somewhat harder, and its result somewhat less than satisfactory. I would not advise any but an honest and candid believer in the theory which identifies genius with idiocy—which at all events would practically define one special form of genius as a note of general idiocy—to study the speeches (they are nine in number, including two brief and final replies to the personal attacks of one Montalembert, whose name used to be rather popular among a certain class of English journalists as that of a practical worshipper of

their great god Compromise, and a professional enemy of all tyranny or villainy that was not serviceable and obsequious to his Church)—to study, I say, the speeches delivered by Victor Hugo in the Legislative Assembly during a space of exactly two years and eight days. The first of these speeches dealt with the question of what in England we call pauperism—with the possibility, the necessity, and the duty of its immediate relief and its ultimate removal: the second, with the infamous and inextinguishable crime which diverted against the Roman republic an expedition sent out under the plea of protecting Rome against the atrocities of Austrian triumph. A double-faced and double-dealing law, which under the name or the mask of free education aimed at securing for clerical instruction a monopoly of public support and national encouragement, was exposed and denounced by Hugo in a speech which insisted no less earnestly and eloquently on the spiritual duty and the spiritual necessity of faith and hope than on the practical necessity and duty of vigilant resistance to priestly pretension, and vigilant exposure of ecclesiastical hypocrisy and reactionary intrigue. Against 'the dry guillotine' of imprisonment in a tropical climate added to transportation for political offences, the whole eloquence of a heart as great as his genius was poured forth in fervour of indignation and pity, of passion and reason combined. The next trick of the infamous game played by the conspirators against the commonwealth, who were now beginning to show their hand, was the mutilation of the suffrage. To this again Victor Hugo opposed the same steadfast front of earnest and rational resistance; and yet again to the sidelong attack of the same political gang on the existing freedom of the press. A year and eight days elapsed before the delivery of his next and

last great speech in the Assembly which he would fain have saved from the shame and ruin then hard at hand—the harvest of its own unprincipled infatuation. The fruit of conspiracy, long manured with fraud and falsehood and all the furtive impurities of intrigue, was now ripe even to rottenness, and ready to fall into the hands already stretched towards it—into the lips yet open to protest that no one—the accuser himself must know it—that no one was dreaming of a second French empire. All that reason and indignation, eloquence and argument, loyalty and sincerity could do to save the commonwealth from destruction and the country from disgrace, was done: how utterly in vain is matter of history—of one among the darkest pages in the roll of its criminal records. The voice of truth and honour was roared and hooted down by the faction whose tactics would have discredited a den of less dishonest and more barefaced thieves; the stroke of state was ready for striking; and the orator's next address was the utterance of an exile.

There are not, even in the whole work of Victor Hugo, many pages of deeper and more pathetic interest than those which explain to us 'what exile is.' Each of the three prefaces to the three volumes of his *Actes et Paroles* is rich in living eloquence, in splendid epigram and description, narrative and satire and study of men and things: but the second, it seems to me, would still be first in attraction, if it had no other claim than this, that it contains the record of the death of Captain Harvey. No reverence for innocent and heroic suffering, no abhorrence of triumphant and execrable crime, can impede or interfere with our sense of the incalculable profit, the measureless addition to his glory and our gain, resulting from Victor Hugo's

exile of nineteen years and nine months. Greater already than all other poets of his time together, these years were to make him greater than any but the very greatest of all time. His first task was of course the discharge of a direct and practical duty ; the record or registration of the events he had just witnessed, the infliction on the principal agent in them of the simple and immediate chastisement consisting in the delineation of his character and the recapitulation of his work. There would seem to be among modern Englishmen an impression—somewhat singular, it appears to me, in a race which professes to hold in special reverence a book so dependent for its arguments and its effects on a continuous appeal to conscience and emotion as the Bible—that the presence of passion, be it never so righteous, so rational, so inevitable by any one not ignoble or insane, implies the absence of reason ; that such indignation as inflamed the lips of Elijah with prophecy, and armed the hand of Jesus with a scourge, is a sign—except of course in Palestine of old—that the person affected by this kind of moral excitement must needs be a lunatic of the sentimental if not rather of the criminal type. The main facts recorded in the pages of *Napoléon le Petit* and *L'Histoire d'un Crime* are simple, flagrant, palpable, indisputable. The man who takes any other view of them than is expressed in these two books must be prepared to impugn and to confute the principle that perjury, robbery, and murder are crimes. But, we are told, the perpetual vehemence of incessant imprecation, the stormy insistence of unremitting obloquy, which accompanies every chapter, illuminates every page, underlines every sentence of the narrative, must needs impair the confidence of an impartial reader in the trustworthiness of a chronicle and a commentary written throughout

as in characters of flaming fire. Englishmen are proud to prefer a more temperate, a more practical, a more sedate form of political or controversial eloquence. When I remember and consider certain examples of popular oratory and controversy now flagrant and flourishing among us, I am tempted to doubt the exact accuracy of this undoubtedly plausible proposition : but, be that as it may, I must take leave to doubt yet more emphatically the implied conclusion that the best or the only good witness procurable on a question of right and wrong is one too impartial to feel enthusiasm or indignation ; that indifference alike to good and evil is the sign of perfect equity and trustworthiness in a judge of moral or political questions ; that a man who has witnessed a deliberate massacre of unarmed men, women, and children, if he be indiscreet enough to describe his experience in any tone but that of a scientific or æsthetic serenity, forfeits the inherent right of a reasonable and an honourable man to command a respectful and attentive hearing from all honourable and reasonable men.

But, valuable and precious as all such readers will always hold these two books of immediate and implacable history, they will not, I presume, be rated among the more important labours of their author's literary life. No one who would know fully or would estimate aright the greatest genius born into the world in our nineteenth century can afford to pass them by with less than careful and sympathetic study : for without moral sympathy no care will enable a student to form any but a trivial and a frivolous judgment on writings which make their primary appeal to the conscience—to the moral instinct and the moral intelligence of the reader. They may perhaps not improperly be classed, for historic or biographic interest, with the *Littérature*

*et Philosophie mêlées* which had been given to the world in 1834. From the crudest impressions of the boy to the ripest convictions of the man, one common quality informs and harmonises every stage of thought, every phase of feeling, every change of spiritual outlook, which has left its mark on the writings of which that collection is composed ; the quality of a pure, a perfect, an intense and burning sincerity. Apart from this personal interest which informs them all, two at least are indispensable to any serious and thorough study of Hugo's work : the fervent and reiterated intercession on behalf of the worse than neglected treasures of mediæval architecture then delivered over for a prey to the claws of the destroyer and the paws of the restorer ; the superb essay on Mirabeau, which remains as a landmark or a tide-mark in the history of his opinions and the development of his powers. But the highest expression of these was not to be given in prose—not even in the prose of Victor Hugo.

There is not, it seems to me, in all this marvellous life, to which wellnigh every year brought its additional aureole of glory, a point more important, a date more memorable, than the publication of the *Châtiments*. Between the prologue *Night* and the epilogue *Light* the ninety-eight poems that roll and break and lighten and thunder like waves of a visible sea fulfil the choir of their crescent and reflux harmonies with hardly less depth and change and strength of music, with no less living force and with no less passionate unity, than the waters on whose shores they were written. Two poems, the third and the sixth, in the first of the seven books into which the collection is divided, may be taken as immediate and sufficient instances of the two different keys in which the entire

book is written ; of the two styles, one bitterly and keenly realistic, keeping scornfully close to shameful fact—one higher in flight and wider in range of outlook, soaring strongly to the very summits of lyric passion—which alternate in terrible and sublime antiphony throughout the living pages of this imperishable record. A second Juvenal might have drawn for us with not less of angry fidelity and superb disgust the ludicrous and loathsome inmates of the den infested by holy hirelings of the clerical press : no Roman satirist could have sung, no Roman lyrist could have thundered, such a poem as that which has blasted for ever the name and the memory of the prostitute archbishop Sibour. The poniard of the priest who struck him dead at the altar he had desecrated struck a blow less deep and deadly than had been dealt already on the renegade pander of a far more infamous assassin. The next poem is a notable and remarkable example of the fusion sometimes accomplished—or, if this be thought a phrase too strong for accuracy, of the middle note sometimes touched, of the middle way sometimes taken—between the purely lyric and the purely satiric style or method. But it would be necessary to dwell on every poem, to pause at every page, if adequate justice were to be done to this or indeed to any of the volumes of verse published from this time forth by Victor Hugo. I will therefore, not without serious diffidence, venture once more to indicate by selection such poems as seem to me most especially notable among the greatest even of these. In the first book, besides the three already mentioned, I take for examples the solemn utterance of indignant mourning addressed to the murdered dead of the fourth of December ; the ringing song in praise of art which ends in a note of noble menace ; the scornful song that follows it, with a burden so

majestic in its variations ; the fearful and faithful ' map of Europe ' in 1852, with its closing word of witness for prophetic hope and faith ; and the simple perfection of pathos in the song of the little forsaken birds and lambs and children. In the second book, the appeal ' To the People,' with a threefold cry for burden, calling on the buried Lazarus to rise again in words that seem to reverberate from stanza to stanza like peal upon peal of living thunder, prolonged in steadfast cadence from height to height across the hollows of a range of mountains, is one of the most wonderful symphonies of tragic and triumphant verse that ever shook the hearts of its hearers with rapture of rage and pity. The first and the two last stanzas seem to me absolutely unsurpassed and unsurpassable for pathetic majesty of music :—

Partout pleurs, sanglots, cris funèbres.  
 Pourquoi dors-tu dans les ténèbres ?  
 Je ne veux pas que tu sois mort.  
 Pourquoi dors-tu dans les ténèbres ?  
 Ce n'est pas l'instant où l'on dort.  
 La pâle Liberté gît sanglante à ta porte.  
 Tu le sais, toi mort, elle est morte.  
 Voici le chacal sur ton seuil,  
 Voici les rats et les belettes,  
 Pourquoi t'es-tu laissé lier de bandelettes ?  
 Ils te mordent dans ton cerceuil !  
 De tous les peuples on prépare  
     Le convoi . . . —  
 Lazare ! Lazare ! Lazare !  
     Lève-toi !

Ils bâtissent des prisons neuves ;  
 O dormeur sombre, entends les fleuves  
 Murmurer, teints de sang vermeil ;  
 Entends pleurer les pauvres veuves,  
 O noir dormeur au dur sommeil !



Martyrs, adieu ! le vent souffle, les pontons flottent,  
 Les mères au front gris sanglotent ;  
 Leurs fils sont en proie aux vainqueurs ;  
 Elles gémissent sur la route ;  
 Les pleurs qui de leurs yeux s'échappent goutte à goutte  
 Filtrent en haine dans nos cœurs.  
 Les juifs triomphent, groupe avare  
 Et sans foi . . .—  
 Lazare ! Lazare ! Lazare !  
 Lève-toi !

Mais, il semble qu'on se réveille !  
 Est-ce toi que j'ai dans l'oreille,  
 Bourdonnement du sombre essaim ?  
 Dans la ruche frémit l'abeille ;  
 J'entends sourdre un vague tocsin.  
 Les Césars, oubliant qu'il est des gémonies,  
 S'endorment dans les symphonies,  
 Du lac Baltique au mont Étna ;  
 Les peuples sont dans la nuit noire ;  
 Dormez, rois ; le clairon dit aux tyrans : victoire !  
 Et l'orgue leur chante : hosanna !  
 Qui répond à cette fanfare ?  
 Le beffroi . . .—  
 Lazare ! Lazare ! Lazare !  
 Lève-toi !

If ever a more superb structure of lyric verse was devised by the brain of man, it must have been, I am very certain, in a language utterly unknown to me. Every line, every pause, every note of it should be studied and restudied by those who would thoroughly understand the lyrical capacity of Hugo's at its very highest point of power, in the fullest sweetness of its strength.

About the next poem—'Souvenir de la nuit du 4'—others may try, if they please, to write, if they can ; I can only confess that I cannot. Nothing so intolerable in its pathos, I should think, was ever written.

The stately melody of the stanzas in which the exile salutes in a tone of severe content the sorrows that

environ and the comforts that sustain him, the island of his refuge, the sea-birds and the sea-rocks and the sea, closes aptly with yet another thought of the mothers weeping for their children :—

Puisque le juste est dans l'abîme,  
 Puisqu'on donne le sceptre au crime,  
 Puisque tous les droits sont trahis,  
 Puisque les plus fiers restent mornes,  
 Puisqu'on affiche au coin des bornes  
 Le déshonneur de mon pays ;

O République de nos pères,  
 Grand Panthéon plein de lumières,  
 Dôme d'or dans le libre azur,  
 Temple des ombres immortelles,  
 Puisqu'on vient avec des échelles  
 Coller l'empire sur ton mur ;

Puisque toute âme est affaiblie ;  
 Puisqu'on rampe ; puisqu'on oublie  
 Le vrai, le pur, le grand, le beau,  
 Les yeux indignés de l'histoire,  
 L'honneur, la loi, le droit, la gloire,  
 Et ceux qui sont dans le tombeau ;

Je t'aime, exil ! douleur, je t'aime !  
 Tristesse, sois mon diadème.  
 Je t'aime, altière pauvreté !  
 J'aime ma porte aux vents battue.  
 J'aime le deuil, grave statue  
 Qui vient s'asseoir à mon côté.

J'aime le malheur qui m'éprouve,  
 Et cette ombre où je vous retrouve,  
 O vous à qui mon cœur sourit,  
 Dignité, foi, vertu voilée,  
 Toi, liberté, fière exilée,  
 Et toi, dévouement, grand proscrit !

J'aime cette île solitaire,  
 Jersey, que la libre Angleterre

Couvre de son vieux pavillon,  
L'eau noire, par moments accrue,  
Le navire, errante charrue,  
Le flot, mystérieux sillon.

J'aime ta mouette, ô mer profonde,  
Qui secoue en perles ton onde  
Sur son aile aux fauves couleurs,  
Plonge dans les lames géantes,  
Et sort de ces gueules béantes  
Comme l'âme sort des douleurs.

J'aime la roche solennelle  
D'où j'entends la plainte éternelle,  
Sans trêve comme le remords,  
Toujours renaissant dans les ombres,  
Des vagues sur les écueils sombres,  
Des mères sur leurs enfants morts.

The close of the fourth poem in the third book is a nobler protest than ever has been uttered or ever can be uttered in prose against the servile sophism of a false democracy which affirms or allows that a people has the divine right of voting itself into bondage. There is nothing grander in Juvenal, and nothing more true :

Ce droit, sachez-le bien, chiens du berger Maupais,  
Et la France et le peuple eux-mêmes ne l'ont pas.  
L'altière Vérité jamais ne tombe en cendre.  
La Liberté n'est pas une guenille à vendre,  
Jetée au tas, pendue au clou chez un fripier.  
Quand un peuple se laisse au piège estropier,  
Le droit sacré, toujours à soi-même fidèle,  
Dans chaque citoyen trouve une citadelle ;  
On s'illustre en bravant un lâche conquérant,  
Et le moindre du peuple en devient le plus grand.  
Donc, trouvez du bonheur, ô plates créatures,  
A vivre dans la fange et dans les pourritures,  
Adorez ce fumier sous ce dais de brocart,  
L'honnête homme recule et s'accoude à l'écart.  
Dans la chute d'autrui je ne veux pas descendre.  
L'honneur n'abdique point. Nul n'a droit de me prendre

Ma liberté, mon bien, mon ciel bleu, mon amour.  
 Tout l'univers aveugle est sans droit sur le jour.  
 Fût-on cent millions d'esclaves, je suis libre.  
 Ainsi parle Caton. Sur la Seine ou le Tibre,  
 Personne n'est tombé tant qu'un seul est debout.  
 Le vieux sang des aïeux qui s'indigne et qui bout,  
 La vertu, la fierté, la justice, l'histoire,  
 Toute une nation avec toute sa gloire  
 Vit dans le dernier front qui ne veut pas plier.  
 Pour soutenir le temple il suffit d'un pilier ;  
 Un Français, c'est la France ; un Romain contient Rome,  
 Et ce qui brise un peuple avorte aux pieds d'un homme.

The sixth and seventh poems in this book are each a superb example of its kind ; the verses on an interview between Abd-el-Kader and Bonaparte are worthy of a place among the earlier *Orientales* for simplicity and fullness of effect in lyric tone and colour ; and satire could hardly give a finer and completer little study than that of the worthy tradesman who for love of his own strong-box would give his vote for a very Phalaris to reign over him, and put up with the brazen bull for love of the golden calf : an epigram which sums up an epoch. The indignant poem of *Joyeuse Vie*, with its terrible photographs of subterranean toil and want, is answered by the not less terrible though ringing and radiant song of *L'empereur s'amuse* ; and this again by the four solemn stanzas in which a whole world of desolate suffering is condensed and realised. The verses of good counsel in which the imperial Macaire is admonished not to take himself too seriously, or trust in the duration of his fair and foul good fortune, are unsurpassed for concentration of contempt. The dialogue of the tyrannicide by the starlit sea with all visible and invisible things that impel or implore him to do justice is so splendid and thrilling in its keen and ardent brevity that we can hardly feel as though a

sufficient answer were given to the instinctive reasoning which finds inarticulate utterance in the cry of the human conscience for retribution by a human hand, even when we read the two poems, at once composed and passionate in their austerity, which bid men leave God to deal with the supreme criminal of humanity. *A Night's Lodging*, the last poem of the fourth book, is perhaps the very finest and most perfect example of imaginative and tragic satire that exists : if this rank be due to a poem at once the most vivid in presentation, the most sublime in scorn, the most intense and absolute in condensed expression of abhorrence and in assured expression of belief.

But in the fifth of these seven caskets of chiselled gold and tempered steel there is a pearl of greater price than in any of the four yet opened. The song dated from sea, which takes farewell of all good things and all gladness left behind—of house and home, of the flowers and the sky, of the betrothed bride with her maiden brow—the song which has in its burden the heavy plashing sound of the wave following on the wave that swells and breaks against the bulwarks—the song of darkening waters and darkened lives has in it a magic, for my own ear at least, incomparable in the whole wide world of human song. Even to the greatest poets of all time such a godsend as this—such a breath of instant inspiration—can come but rarely and seem given as by miracle. ‘There is sorrow on the sea,’ as the prophet said of old ; but when was there sorrow on sea or land which found such piercing and such perfect utterance as this ?

Adieu, patrie !  
L'onde est en furie.  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

Adieu, maison, treille au fruit mûr,  
Adieu, les fleurs d'or du vieux mur !

Adieu, patrie !  
Ciel, forêt, prairie !  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

Adieu, patrie !  
L'onde est en furie.  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

Adieu, fiancée au front pur,  
Le ciel est noir, le vent est dur.

Adieu, patrie !  
Lise, Anna, Marie !  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

Adieu, patrie !  
L'onde est en furie.  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

Notre œil, que voile un deuil futur,  
Va du flot sombre au sort obscur.

Adieu, patrie !  
Pour toi mon cœur prie.  
Adieu, patrie,  
Azur !

The next poem is addressed to a disappointed accomplice of the crime still triumphant and imperial in the eyes of his fellow-scoundrels, who seems to have shown signs of a desire to break away from them and a suspicion that even then the ship of empire was beginning to leak—though in fact it had still seventeen years of more or less radiant rascality to float through before it foundered in the ineffable ignominy of Sedan. Full of ringing and stinging eloquence, of keen and sonorous

lines or lashes of accumulating scorn, this poem is especially noteworthy for its tribute to the murdered republic of Rome. Certain passages in certain earlier works of Hugo, in *Cromwell* for instance and in *Marie Tudor*, had given rise to a natural and indeed inevitable suspicion of some prejudice or even antipathy on the writer's part which had not less unavoidably aroused a feeling among Italians that his disposition or tone of mind was anything but cordial or indeed amicable towards their country: a suspicion probably heightened, and a feeling probably sharpened, by his choice of such dramatic subjects from Italian history or tradition as the domestic eccentricities of the exceptional family of Borgia, and the inquisitorial misdirection of the degenerate commonwealth of Venice. To the sense that Hugo was hardly less than an enemy and that Byron had been something more than a well-wisher to Italy I have always attributed the unquestionable and otherwise inexplicable fact that Mazzini should have preferred the pinchbeck and tinsel of Byron to the gold and ivory of Hugo. But it was impossible that the master poet of the world should not live to make amends, if indeed amends were needed, to the country of Mazzini and of Dante.

If I have hardly time to mention the simple and vivid narrative of the martyrdom of Pauline Roland, I must pause at least to dwell for a moment on so famous and so great a poem as *L'Expiation*; but not to pronounce, or presume to endeavour to decide, which of its several pictures is the most powerful, which of its epic or lyric variations the most impressive and triumphant in effect. The huge historic pageant of ruin, from Moscow to Waterloo, from Waterloo to St. Helena, with the posthumous interlude of apotheosis which the poet had loudly and proudly celebrated just

twelve years earlier in an ode, turned suddenly into the peep-show of a murderous mountebank, the tawdry triumph of buffoons besmeared with innocent blood, is so tremendous in its anticlimax that not the sublimest and most miraculous climax imaginable could make so tragic and sublime an impression so indelible from the mind. The slow agony of the great army under the snow ; its rout and dissolution in the supreme hour of panic ; the slower agony, the more gradual dissolution, of the prisoner with a gaoler's eye intent on him to the last ; who can say which of these three is done into verse with most faultless and sovereign power of hand, most pathetic or terrific force and skill ? And the hideous judicial dishonour of the crowning retribution after death, the parody of his empire and the prostitution of his name, is so much more than tragic by reason of the very farce in it that out of ignominy itself and uttermost degradation the poet has made something more august in moral impression than all pageants of battle or of death.

In the sixth book I can but rapidly remark the peculiar beauty and greatness of the lyric lines in which the sound of steady seas regularly breaking on the rocks at Rozel Tower is rendered with so solemn and severe an echo of majestic strength in sadness ; the verses addressed to the people on its likeness and unlikeness to the sea ; the scornful and fiery appeal to the spirit of Juvenal ; the perfect idyllic picture of spring, with all the fruitless exultation of its blossoms and its birds, made suddenly dark and dissonant by recollection of human crime and shame ; the heavenly hopefulness of comfort in the message of the morning star, conveyed into colours of speech and translated into cadences of sound which no painter or musician could achieve :—



Je m'étais endormi la nuit près de la grève.  
Un vent frais m'éveilla, je sortis de mon rêve,  
J'ouvris les yeux, je vis l'étoile du matin.  
Elle resplendissait au fond du ciel lointain  
Dans une blancheur molle, infinie et charmante.  
Aquilon s'enfuyait emportant la tourmente.  
L'astre éclatant changeait la nuée en duvet.  
C'était une clarté qui pensait, qui vivait ;  
Elle apaisait l'écueil où la vague déferle ;  
On croyait voir une âme à travers une perle.  
Il faisait nuit encor, l'ombre régnait en vain,  
Le ciel s'illuminait d'un sourire divin.  
La lueur argentait le haut du mât qui penche ;  
Le navire était noir, mais la voile était blanche ;  
Des goëlands debout sur un escarpement,  
Attentifs, contemplaient l'étoile gravement  
Comme un oiseau céleste et fait d'une étincelle ;  
L'océan, qui ressemble au peuple, allait vers elle,  
Et, rugissant tout bas, la regardait briller,  
Et semblait avoir peur de la faire envoler.  
Un ineffable amour emplissait l'étendue.  
L'herbe verte à mes pieds frissonnait éperdue,  
Les oiseaux se parlaient dans les nids ; une fleur  
Qui s'éveillait me dit : c'est l'étoile ma sœur.  
Et pendant qu'à longs plis l'ombre levait son voile,  
J'entendis une voix qui venait de l'étoile  
Et qui disait :—Je suis l'astre qui vient d'abord.  
Je suis celle qu'on croit dans la tombe et qui sort.  
J'ai lui sur le Sina, j'ai lui sur le Taygète ;  
Je suis le caillou d'or et de feu que Dieu jette,  
Comme avec une fronde, au front noir de la nuit.  
Je suis ce qui renaît quand un monde est détruit.  
O nations ! je suis la Poésie ardente.  
J'ai brillé sur Moïse et j'ai brillé sur Dante.  
Le lion océan est amoureux de moi.  
J'arrive. Levez-vous, vertu, courage, foi !  
Penseurs, esprits ! montez sur la tour, sentinelles !  
Paupières, ouvrez-vous ; allumez-vous, prunelles ;  
Terre, émeus le sillon ; vie, éveille le bruit ;  
Debout, vous qui dormez ; car celui qui me suit,  
Car celui qui m'envoie en avant la première,  
C'est l'ange Liberté, c'est le géant Lumière !

The first poem of the seventh book, on the falling of the walls of Jericho before the seventh trumpet-blast, is equally great in description and in application ; the third is one of the great lyric masterpieces of all time, the triumphant ballad of the Black Huntsman, unsurpassed in the world for ardour of music and fitful change of note from mystery and terror to rage and tempest and supreme serenity of exultation—‘ wind and storm fulfilling his word,’ we may literally say of this omnipotent sovereign of song.

The sewer of Rome, a final receptacle for dead dogs and rotting Cæsars, is painted line by line and detail by detail in verse which touches with almost frightful skill the very limit of the possible or permissible to poetry in the way of realistic loathsomeness or photographic horror ; relieved here and there by a rare and exquisite image, a fresh breath or tender touch of loveliness from the open air of the daylight world above. The song on the two Napoleons is a masterpiece of skilful simplicity in contrast of tones and colours. But the song which follows, written to a tune of Beethoven’s, has in it something more than the whole soul of music, the whole passion of self-devoted hope and self-transfiguring faith ; it gives the final word of union between sound and spirit, the mutual coronation and consummation of them both :—

#### PATRIA

Là-haut qui sourit ?  
 Est-ce un esprit ?  
 Est-ce une femme ?  
 Quel front sombre et doux !  
 Peuple, à genoux !  
 Est-ce notre âme  
 Qui vient à nous ?

Cette figure en deuil  
Paraît sur notre seuil,  
Et notre antique orgueil  
Sort du cercueil.  
Ses fiers regards vainqueurs  
Réveillent tous les cœurs,  
Les nids dans les buissons,  
Et les chansons.

C'est l'ange du jour ;  
L'espoir, l'amour  
Du cœur qui pense ;  
Du monde enchanté  
C'est la clarté.  
Son nom est France  
Ou Vérité.

Bel ange, à ton miroir  
Quand s'offre un vil pouvoir,  
Tu viens, terrible à voir,  
Sous le ciel noir.  
Tu dis au monde : Allons !  
Formez vos bataillons !  
Et le monde ébloui  
Te répond : Oui.

C'est l'ange de nuit.  
Rois, il vous suit,  
Marquant d'avance  
Le fatal moment  
Au firmament.  
Son nom est France  
Ou Châtiment.

Ainsi que nous voyons  
En mai les alcyons,  
Voguez, ô nations,  
Dans ses rayons !  
Son bras aux cieux dressé  
Ferme le noir passé  
Et les portes de fer  
Du sombre enfer.

## A STUDY OF VICTOR HUGO

C'est l'ange de Dieu.  
 Dans le ciel bleu  
 Son aile immense  
 Couvre avec fierté  
 L'humanité.  
 Son nom est France  
 Ou Liberté !

*The Caravan*, a magnificent picture, is also a magnificent allegory and a magnificent hymn. The poem following sums up in twenty-six lines a whole world of terror and of tempest hurtling and wailing round the wreck of a boat by night. It is followed by a superb appeal against the infliction of death on rascals whose reptile blood would dishonour and defile the scaffold : and this again by an admonition to their chief not to put his trust in the chance of a high place of infamy among the more genuinely imperial hellhounds of historic record. The next poem gives us in perfect and exquisite summary the opinions of a contemporary conservative on a dangerous anarchist of extravagant opinions and disreputable character, whom for example's sake it was at length found necessary to crucify. There is no song more simply and nobly pitiful than that which tells us in its burden how a man may die for lack of his native country as naturally and inevitably as for lack of his daily bread. I cite only the last three stanzas by way of sample :—

Les exilés s'en vont pensifs.  
 Leur âme, hélas ! n'est plus entière.  
 Ils regardent l'ombre des ifs  
 Sur les fosses du cimetière ;  
 L'un songe à l'Allemagne altière,  
 L'autre au beau pays transalpin,  
 L'autre à sa Pologne chérie.  
 —On ne peut pas vivre sans pain ;  
 On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.—

Un proscrit, lassé de souffrir,  
 Mourait ; calme, il fermait son livre ;  
 Et je lui dis : ' Pourquoi mourir ? '  
 Il me répondit : ' Pourquoi vivre ? '  
 Puis il reprit : ' Je me délivre.  
 Adieu ! je meurs. Néron Scapin  
 Met aux fers la France flétrie. . . . '  
 —On ne peut pas vivre sans pain ;  
 On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.—

' . . . Je meurs de ne plus voir les champs  
 Où je regardais l'aube naître,  
 De ne plus entendre les chants  
 Que j'entendais de ma fenêtre.  
 Mon âme est où je ne puis être.  
 Sous quatre planches de sapin  
 Enterrez-moi dans la prairie.'  
 —On ne peut pas vivre sans pain ;  
 On ne peut pas non plus vivre sans la patrie.

Then, in the later editions of the book, came the great and terrible poem on the life and death of the miscreant marshal who gave the watchword of massacre in the streets of Paris, and died by the visitation of disease before the walls of Sebastopol. There is hardly a more splendid passage of its kind in all the *Légende des Siècles* than the description of the departure of the fleet in order of battle from Constantinople for the Crimea ; nor a loftier passage of more pathetic austerity in all this book of *Châtiments* than the final address of the poet to the miserable soul, disembodied at length after long and loathsome suffering, of the murderer and traitor who had earned no soldier's death.<sup>1</sup>

And then come those majestic ' last words ' which will ring for ever in the ears of men till manhood as

<sup>1</sup> This poem on Saint-Arnaud is dated from Jersey, and must therefore have been written before the second of November 1855—a date of disgrace for Jersey, if not indeed for England. It appears in the various later editions of the *Châtiments*, but has disappeared from the so-called ' édition définitive.' All readers have a right to ask why—and a right to be answered when they ask.

well as poetry has ceased to have honour among mankind. And then comes a poem so great that I hardly dare venture to attempt a word in its praise. We cannot choose but think, as we read or repeat it, that 'such music was never made' since the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. This epilogue of a book so bitterly and inflexibly tragic begins as with a peal of golden bells, or an outbreak of all April in one choir of sunbright song; proceeds in a graver note of deep and trustful exultation and yearning towards the future; subsides again into something of a more subdued key, while the poet pleads for his faith in a God of righteousness with the righteous who are ready to despair; and rises from that tone of awe-stricken and earnest pleading to such a height and rapture of inspiration as no Hebrew psalmist or prophet ever soared beyond in his divinest passion of aspiring trust and worship. It is simply impossible that a human tongue should utter, a human hand should write, anything of more supreme and transcendent beauty than the last ten stanzas of the fourth division of this poem. The passionate and fervent accumulation of sublimities, of marvellous images and of infinite appeal, leaves the sense too dazzled, the soul too entranced and exalted, to appreciate at first or in full the miraculous beauty of the language, the superhuman sweetness of the song. The reader impervious to such impressions may rest assured that what he admires in the prophecies or the psalms of Isaiah or of David is not the inspiration of the text, but the warrant and sign-manual of the councils and the churches which command him to admire them on trust:—

Ne possède-t-il pas toute la certitude ?  
Dieu ne remplit-il pas ce monde, notre étude,  
Du nadir au zénith ?

Notre sagesse auprès de la sienne est démente ;  
Et n'est-ce pas à lui que la clarté commence,  
Et que l'ombre finit ?

Ne voit-il pas ramper les hydres sur leurs ventres ?  
Ne regarde-t-il pas jusqu'au fond de leurs antres  
Atlas et Pélion ?

Ne connaît-il pas l'heure où la cigogne émigre ?  
Sait-il pas ton entrée et ta sortie, ô tigre,  
Et ton antre, ô lion ?

Hirondelle, réponds, aigle à l'aile sonore,  
Parle, avez-vous des nids que l'Éternel ignore ?  
O cerf, quand l'as-tu fui ?

Renard, ne vois-tu pas ses yeux dans la broussaille ?  
Loup, quand tu sens la nuit une herbe qui tressaille,  
Ne dis-tu pas : C'est lui !

Puisqu'il sait tout cela, puisqu'il peut toute chose,  
Que ses doigts font jaillir les effets de la cause  
Comme un noyau d'un fruit,  
Puisqu'il peut mettre un ver dans les pommes de l'arbre,  
Et faire disperser les colonnes de marbre  
Par le vent de la nuit ;

Puisqu'il bat l'océan pareil au bœuf qui beugle,  
Puisqu'il est le voyant et que l'homme est l'aveugle,  
Puisqu'il est le milieu,

Puisque son bras nous porte, et puisqu'à son passage  
La comète frissonne ainsi qu'en une cage  
Tremble une étoupe en feu ;

Puisque l'obscur nuit le connaît, puisque l'ombre  
Le voit, quand il lui plaît, sauver la nef qui sombré,  
Comment douterions-nous,

Nous qui, fermes et purs, fiers dans nos agonies,  
Sommes debout devant toutes les tyrannies,  
Pour lui seul, à genoux !

D'ailleurs, pensons. Nos jours sont des jours d'amertume,  
Mais, quand nous étendons les bras dans cette brume,  
Nous sentons une main ;

Quand nous marchons, courbés, dans l'ombre du martyr,  
Nous entendons quelqu'un derrière nous nous dire :  
C'est ici le chemin.

O proscrits, l'avenir est aux peuples ! Paix, gloire,  
 Liberté, reviendront sur des chars de victoire  
     Aux foudroyants essieux ;  
 Ce crime qui triomphe est fumée et mensonge ;  
 Voilà ce que je puis affirmer, moi qui songe  
     L'œil fixé sur les cieux !

Les Césars sont plus fiers que les vagues marines,  
 Mais Dieu dit :—Je mettrai ma boucle en leurs narines,  
     Et dans leur bouche un mors,  
 Et je les traînerai, qu'on cède ou bien qu'on lutte,  
 Eux et leurs histrions et leurs joueurs de flûte,  
     Dans l'ombre où sont les morts !

Dieu dit ; et le granit que foulait leur semelle  
 S'écroule, et les voilà disparus pêle-mêle  
     Dans leurs prospérités !  
 Aquilon ! aquilon ! qui viens battre nos portes,  
 Oh ! dis-nous, si c'est toi, souffle, qui les emportes,  
     Où les as-tu jetés ?

Three years after the *Châtiments* Victor Hugo published the *Contemplations* ; the book of which he said that if the title did not sound somewhat pretentious it might be called ' the memoirs of a soul.' No book had ever in it more infinite and exquisite variety ; no concert ever diversified and united such inexhaustible melodies with such unsurpassable harmonies. The note of fatherhood was never touched more tenderly than in the opening verses of gentle counsel, whose cadence is fresher and softer than the lapse of rippling water or the sense of falling dew : the picture of the poet's two little daughters in the twilight garden might defy all painters to translate it : the spirit, force, and fun of the controversial poems, overflowing at once with good humour, with serious thought, and with kindly indignation, give life and charm to the obsolete questions of wrangling schools and pedants ;



and the last of them, on the divine and creative power of speech, is at once profound and sublime enough to grapple easily and thoroughly with so high and deep a subject. The songs of childish loves and boyish fancies are unequalled by any other poet's known to me for their union of purity and gentleness with a touch of dawning ardour and a hint of shy delight : *Lise*, *La Coccinelle*, *Vieille chanson du jeune temps*, are such sweet miracles of simple perfection as we hardly find except in the old songs of unknown great poets who died and left no name. The twenty-first poem, a lyric idyl of but sixteen lines, has something more than the highest qualities of Theocritus ; in colour and in melody it does but equal the Sicilian at his best, but there are two lines at least in it beyond his reach for depth and majesty of beauty. *Childhood* and *Unity*, two poems of twelve and ten lines respectively, are a pair of such flawless jewels as lie now in no living poet's casket. Among the twenty-eight poems of the second book, if I venture to name with special regard the second and the fourth, two songs uniting the subtle tenderness of Shelley's with the frank simplicity of Shakespeare's ; the large and living landscape in a letter dated from Tréport ; the tenth and the thirteenth poems, two of the most perfect love-songs in the world, written (if the phrase be permissible) in a key of serene rapture ; the 'morning's note,' with its vision of the sublime sweetness of life transfigured in a dream ; *Twilight*, with its opening touches of magical and mystic beauty ; above all, the mournful and tender magnificence of the closing poem, with a pathetic significance in the double date appended to the text : I am ready to confess that it is perhaps presumptuous to express a preference even for these over the others. Yet perhaps it may be permissible to select for tran-

scription two of the sweetest and shortest among them :—

Mes vers fuiraient, doux et frêles,  
Vers votre jardin si beau,  
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,  
Des ailes comme l'oiseau.

Ils voleraient, étincelles,  
Vers votre foyer qui rit,  
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,  
Des ailes comme l'esprit.

Près de vous, purs et fidèles,  
Ils accourraient nuit et jour,  
Si mes vers avaient des ailes,  
Des ailes comme l'amour.

Nothing of Shelley's exceeds this for limpid perfection of melody, renewed in the next lyric with something of a deeper and more fervent note of music :—

Si vous n'avez rien à me dire,  
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi ?  
Pourquoi me faire ce sourire  
Qui tournerait la tête au roi ?  
Si vous n'avez rien à me dire,  
Pourquoi venir auprès de moi ?

Si vous n'avez rien à m'apprendre,  
Pourquoi me pressez-vous la main ?  
Sur le rêve angélique et tendre,  
Auquel vous songez en chemin,  
Si vous n'avez rien à m'apprendre,  
Pourquoi me pressez-vous la main ?

Si vous voulez que je m'en aille,  
Pourquoi passez-vous par ici ?  
Lorsque je vous vois, je tressaille :  
C'est ma joie et c'est mon souci.  
Si vous voulez que je m'en aille,  
Pourquoi passez-vous par ici ?

In the third book, which brings us up to the great poet's forty-second year, the noble poem called

*Melancholia* has in it a foretaste and a promise of all the passionate meditation, all the studious and indefatigable pity, all the forces of wisdom and of mercy which were to find their completer and supreme expression in *Les Misérables*. In *Saturn* we may trace the same note of earnest and thoughtful meditation on the mystery of evil, on the vision so long cherished by mankind of some purgatorial world, the shrine of expiation or the seat of retribution, which in the final volume of the *Légende des Siècles* was touched again with a yet more august effect: the poem there called *Inferi* resumes and expands the tragic thought here first admitted into speech and first clothed round with music. The four lines written beneath a crucifix may almost be said to sum up the whole soul and spirit of Christian faith or feeling in the brief hour of its early purity, revived in every age again for some rare and beautiful natures—and for these alone:—

Vous qui pleurez, venez à ce Dieu, car il pleure.  
 Vous qui souffrez, venez à lui, car il guérit.  
 Vous qui tremblez, venez à lui, car il sourit.  
 Vous qui passez, venez à lui, car il demeure.

*La Statue*, with its grim swift glance over the worldwide rottenness of imperial Rome, finds again an echo yet fuller and more sonorous than the note which it repeats in the poem on Roman decadence which forms the eighth division of the revised and completed *Légende des Siècles*. The two delicately tender poems on the death of a little child are well relieved by the more terrible tenderness of the poem on a mother found dead of want among her four little children. In this and the next poem, a vivid and ghastly photograph of vicious poverty, we find again the same spirit of observant and vigilant compassion that inspires and informs

the great prose epic of suffering which records the redemption of Jean Valjean : and in the next, suggested by the sight (a sorrowful sight always, except perhaps to very small children or adults yet more diminutive in mental or spiritual size) of a caged lion, we recognise the depth of noble pity which moved its author to write *Le Crapaud*—a poem redeemed in all rational men's eyes from the imminent imputation of repulsive realism by the profound and pathetic beauty of the closing lines—and we may recognise also the imaginative and childlike sympathy with the traditional king of beasts which inspired him long after to write *L'Épopée du Lion* for the benefit of his grandchildren. *Insomnie*, a record of the tribute exacted by the spirit from the body, when the impulse to work and to create will not let the weary workman take his rest, but enforces him, reluctant and recalcitrant, to rise and gird up his loins for labour in the field of imaginative thought, is itself a piece of work well worth the sacrifice even of the happiness of sleep. The verses on music, suggested by the figure of a flute-playing shepherd on a bas-relief ; the splendid and finished picture of spring, softened rather than shadowed by the quiet thought of death ; the deep and tender fancy of the dead child's return to its mother through the gateway of a second birth ; the grave sweetness and gentle fervour of the verses on the outcast and detested things of the animal and the vegetable world ; and, last, the nobly thoughtful and eloquent poem on the greatness of such little things as the fire on the shepherd's hearth confronting the star at sunset, which may be compared with the *Prayer for all men* in the *Feuilles d'Automne* ; these at least demand a rapid word of thankful recognition before we close the first volume of the *Contemplations*.

The fourth book, as most readers will probably remember, contains the poems written in memory of Victor Hugo's daughter, drowned by the accidental capsizing of a pleasure-boat, just six months and seventeen days after her marriage with the young husband who chose rather to share her death than to save himself alone. These immortal songs of mourning are almost too sacred for critical appreciation of even the most reverent and subdued order. There are numberless touches in them of such thrilling beauty, so poignant in their simplicity and so piercing in their truth, that silence is perhaps the best or the only commentary on anything so 'rarely sweet and bitter.' One only may perhaps be cited apart from its fellows : the sublime little poem headed *Mors* :—

Je vis cette faucheuse. Elle était dans son champ.  
Elle allait à grands pas moissonnant et fauchant,  
Noir squelette laissant passer le crépuscule.  
Dans l'ombre où l'on dirait que tout tremble et recule,  
L'homme suivait des yeux les lueurs de sa faux.  
Et les triomphateurs sous les arcs triomphaux  
Tombaient ; elle changeait en désert Babylone,  
Le trône en échafaud et l'échafaud en trône,  
Les roses en fumier, les enfants en oiseaux,  
L'or en cendre, et les yeux des mères en ruisseaux.  
Et les femmes criaient : Rends-nous ce petit être.  
Pour le faire mourir, pourquoi l'avoir fait naître ?  
Ce n'était qu'un sanglot sur terre, en haut, en bas ;  
Des mains aux doigts osseux sortaient des noirs grabats ;  
Un vent froid bruissait dans les linceuls sans nombre ;  
Les peuples éperdus semblaient sous la faux sombre  
Un troupeau frissonnant qui dans l'ombre s'enfuit :  
Tout était sous ses pieds deuil, épouvante et nuit.  
Derrière elle, le front baigné de douces flammes,  
Un ange souriant portait la gerbe d'âmes.

The fifth book opens most fitly with an address to the noble poet who was the comrade of the author's

exile and the brother of his self-devoted son-in-law. Even Hugo never wrote anything of more stately and superb simplicity than this tribute of fatherly love and praise, so well deserved and so royally bestowed. The second poem, addressed to the son of a poet who had the honour to receive the greatest of all his kind as a passing guest in the first days of his long exile, is as simple and noble as it is gentle and austere. The third, written in reply to the expostulations of an old friend and a distant kinsman, is that admirable vindication of a man's right to grow wiser, and of his duty to speak the truth as he comes to see it better, which must have imposed silence and impressed respect on all assailants if respect for integrity and genius were possible to the imbecile or the vile, and if silence or abstinence from insult were possible to the malignant or the fool. But the epilogue, appended nine years later to this high-minded and brilliant poem, is as noble in imagination, in feeling and in expression, as the finest page in the *Châtiment*.

## ÉCRIT EN 1855

J'ajoute un post-scriptum après neuf ans. J'écoute ;  
 Etes-vous toujours là ? Vous êtes mort sans doute,  
 Marquis ; mais d'où je suis on peut parler aux morts.  
 Ah ! votre cercueil s'ouvre :—Où donc es-tu ?—Dehors.  
 Comme vous.—Es-tu mort ?—Presque. J'habite l'ombre.  
 Je suis sur un rocher qu'environne l'eau sombre,  
 Écueil rongé des flots, de ténèbres chargé,  
 Où s'assied, ruisselant, le blême naufragé.  
 —Eh bien, me dites-vous, après ?—La solitude  
 Autour de moi toujours a la même attitude ;  
 Je ne vois que l'abîme, et la mer, et les cieux,  
 Et les nuages noirs qui vont silencieux ;  
 Mon toit, la nuit, frissonne, et l'ouragan le mêle  
 Aux souffles effrénés de l'onde et de la grêle ;  
 Quelqu'un semble clouer un crêpe à l'horizon ;  
 L'insulte bat de loin le seuil de ma maison ;

Le roc croule sous moi dès que mon pied s'y pose ;  
Le vent semble avoir peur de m'approcher, et n'ose  
Me dire qu'en baissant la voix et qu'à demi  
L'adieu mystérieux que me jette un ami.  
La rumeur des vivants s'éteint diminuée.  
Tout ce que j'ai rêvé s'est envolé, nuée !  
Sur mes jours devenus fantômes, pâle et seul,  
Je regarde tomber l'infini, ce linceul.—  
Et vous dites :—Après ?—Sous un mont qui surplombe  
Près des flots, j'ai marqué la place de ma tombe ;  
Ici, le bruit du gouffre est tout ce qu'on entend ;  
Tout est horreur et nuit.—Après ?—Je suis content.

The verses addressed to friends whose love and reverence had not forsaken the exile—to Jules Janin, to Alexandre Dumas, above all to Paul Meurice—are models of stately grace in their utterance of serene and sublime resignation, of loyal and affectionate sincerity : but those addressed to the sharers of his exile—to his wife, to his children, to their friend—have yet a deeper spiritual music in the sweet and severe perfection of their solemn cadence. I have but time to name with a word of homage in passing the famous and faultless little poem *Aux Feuillantines*, fragrant with the memory and musical as the laugh of childhood ; the memorial verses recurring here and there, with such infinite and subtle variations on the same deep theme of mourning or of sympathy ; the great brief studies of lonely landscape, imbued with such grave radiance and such noble melancholy, or kindled with the motion and quickened by the music of the sea : but two poems at all events I must select for more especial tribute of more thankful recognition : the sublime and wonderful vision of the angel who was neither life nor death, but love, more strong than either ; and the all but 'sublimier' allegory couched in verse of such majestic resonance, which shows us the star of Venus in heaven above the ruin

of her island on earth. The former and shorter of these is as excellent an example as could be chosen of its author's sovereign simplicity of insight and of style :—

#### APPARITION

Je vis un ange blanc qui passait sur ma tête ;  
 Son vol éblouissant apaisait la tempête,  
 Et faisait taire au loin la mer pleine de bruit.  
 —Qu'est-ce que tu viens faire, ange, dans cette nuit ?  
 Lui dis-je. Il répondit :—Je viens prendre ton âme.—  
 Et j'eus peur, car je vis que c'était une femme ;  
 Et je lui dis, tremblant et lui tendant les bras :  
 —Que me restera-t-il ? car tu t'envoleras.—  
 Il ne répondit pas ; le ciel que l'ombre assiége  
 S'éteignait. . . —Si tu prends mon âme, m'écriai-je,  
 Où l'emporteras-tu ? montre-moi dans quel lieu.  
 Il se taisait toujours.—O passant du ciel bleu,  
 Es-tu la mort ? lui dis-je, ou bien es-tu la vie ?—  
 Et la nuit augmentait sur mon âme ravie,  
 Et l'ange devint noir, et dit :—Je suis l'amour.  
 Mais son front sombre était plus charmant que le jour,  
 Et je voyais, dans l'ombre où brillaient ses prunelles,  
 Les astres à travers les plumes de ses ailes.

If nothing were left of Hugo but the sixth book of the *Contemplations*, it would yet be indisputable among those who know anything of poetry that he was among the foremost in the front rank of the greatest poets of all time. Here, did space allow, it would be necessary for criticism with any pretence to adequacy to say something of every poem in turn, to pause for observation of some beauty beyond reach of others at every successive page. In the first poem a sublime humility finds such expression as should make manifest to the dullest eye not clouded by malevolence and insolent conceit that when this greatest of modern poets asserts in his own person the high prerogative and assumes



for his own spirit the high office of humanity, to confront the darkest problem and to challenge the utmost force of intangible and invisible injustice as of visible and tangible iniquity, of all imaginable as of all actual evil, of superhuman indifference as well as of human wrong-doing, it is no merely personal claim that he puts forward, no vainly egotistic arrogance that he displays ; but the right of a reasonable conscience and the duty of a righteous faith, common to all men alike in whom intelligence of right and wrong, perception of duty or conception of conscience, can be said to exist at all. If there be any truth in the notion of any difference between evil and good more serious than the conventional and convenient fabrications of doctrine and assumption, then assuredly the meanest of his creatures in whom the perception of this difference was not utterly extinct would have a right to denounce an omnipotent evil-doer as justly amenable to the sentence inflicted by the thunders of his own unrighteous judgment. How profound and intense was the disbelief of Victor Hugo in the rule or in the existence of any such superhuman malefactor could not be better shown than by the almost polemical passion of his prophetic testimony to that need for faith in a central conscience and a central will on which he has insisted again and again as a crowning and indispensable requisite for moral and spiritual life. From the sublime daring, the self-confidence born of self-devotion, which finds lyrical utterance in the majestic verses headed *Ibo*, through the humble and haughty earnestness of remonstrance and appeal—'humble to God, haughty to man'—which pervades the next three poems, the meditative and studious imagination of the poet passes into the fuller light and larger air of thought which imbues and informs with immortal life every

line of the great religious poem called *Pleurs dans la nuit*. In this he touches the highest point of poetic meditation, as in the epilogue to the *Châtiments*, written four months earlier, he had touched the highest point of poetic rapture, possible to the most ardent of believers in his faith and the most unapproachable master of his art. Where all is so lofty in its coherence of construction, so perfect in its harmony of composition, it seems presumptuous to indicate any special miracle of inspired workmanship : yet, as Hugo in his various notes on mediæval architecture was wont to select for exceptional attention and peculiar eloquence of praise this or that part or point of some superb and harmonious building, so am I tempted to dwell for a moment on the sublime imagination, the pathetic passion, of the verses which render into music the idea of a terrene and material purgatory, with its dungeons of flint and cells of clay wherein the spirit imprisoned and imbedded may envy the life and covet the suffering of the meanest animal that toils on earth ; and to set beside this wonderful passage that other which even in a poem so thoroughly imbued with hope and faith finds place and voice for expression of the old mysterious and fantastic horror of the grave, more perfect than ever any mediæval painter or sculptor could achieve :—

Le soir vient ; l'horizon s'emplit d'inquiétude ;  
 L'herbe tremble et bruit comme une multitude ;  
     Le fleuve blanc reluit ;  
 Le paysage obscur prend les veines des marbres :  
 Ces hydres que, le jour, on appelle des arbres,  
     Se tordent dans la nuit.

Le mort est seul. Il sent la nuit qui le dévore.  
 Quand naît le doux matin, tout l'azur de l'aurore,  
     Tous ses rayons si beaux,

Tout l'amour des oiseaux et leurs chansons sans nombre,  
Vont aux berceaux dorés ; et, la nuit, toute l'ombre  
Aboutit aux tombeaux.

Il entend des soupirs dans les fosses voisines ;  
Il sent la chevelure affreuse des racines  
Entrer dans son cercueil ;  
Il est l'être vaincu dont s'empare la chose ;  
Il sent un doigt obscur, sous sa paupière close,  
Lui retirer son œil.

Il a froid ; car le soir qui mêle à son haleine  
Les ténèbres, l'horreur, le spectre et le phalène,  
Glace ces durs grabats ;  
Le cadavre, lié de bandelettes blanches,  
Grelotte, et dans sa bière entend les quatre planches  
Qui lui parlent tout bas.

L'une dit :—Je fermis ton coffre-fort.—Et l'autre  
Dit :—J'ai servi de porte au toit qui fut le nôtre.—  
L'autre dit :—Aux beaux jours,  
La table où rit l'ivresse et que le vin encombre,  
C'était moi.—L'autre dit :—J'étais le chevet sombre  
Du lit de tes amours.

Among all the poems which follow, some exquisite in their mystic tenderness as the elegiac stanzas on *Claire* and the appealing address to a friend unknown (*À celle qui est voilée*), others possessed with the same faith and wrestling with the same questions as beset and sustained the writer of the poem at which we have just rapidly and reverently glanced, there are three at least which demand at any rate one passing word of homage. The solemn song of meditation 'at the window by night' seems to me to render in its first six lines the aspects and sounds of sea and cloud and wind and trees and stars with an utterly incomparable magic of interpretation :—

Les étoiles, points d'or, percent les branches noires ;  
Le flot huileux et lourd décompose ses moires  
Sur l'océan blêmi ;

Les nuages ont l'air d'oiseaux prenant la fuite ;  
 Par moments le vent parle, et dit des mots sans suite,  
 Comme un homme endormi.

No poet but one could have written the three stanzas, so full of infinite sweetness and awe, inscribed ' to the angels who see us ' :—

—Passant, qu'es-tu ? je te connais.  
 Mais, étant spectre, ombre et nuage,  
 Tu n'as plus de sexe ni d'âge.  
 —Je suis ta mère, et je venais !  
 —Et toi dont l'aile hésite et brille,  
 Dont l'œil est noyé de douceur,  
 Qu'es-tu, passant ?—Je suis ta sœur.  
 —Et toi, qu'es-tu ?—Je suis ta fille.  
 —Et toi, qu'es-tu, passant ?—Je suis  
 Celle à qui tu disais : Je t'aime !  
 —Et toi ?—Je suis ton âme même.—  
 Oh ! cachez-moi, profondes nuits !

Nor could any other hand have achieved the pathetic perfection of the verses in which just thirty years since, twelve years to a day after the loss of his daughter, and fifteen years to a day before the return of liberty which made possible the return of Victor Hugo to France, his claims to the rest into which he now has entered, and his reasons for desiring the attainment of that rest, found utterance unexcelled for divine and deep simplicity by any utterance of man on earth :—

#### EN FRAPPANT À UNE PORTE

J'ai perdu mon père et ma mère,  
 Mon premier-né, bien jeune, hélas !  
 Et pour moi la nature entière  
 Sonne le glas.

Je dormais entre mes deux frères ;  
 Enfants, nous étions trois oiseaux ;  
 Hélas ! le sort change en deux bières  
 Leurs deux berceaux.

Je t'ai perdue, ô fille chère,  
Toi qui remplis, ô mon orgueil,  
Tout mon destin de la lumière  
De ton cercueil !

J'ai su monter, j'ai su descendre.  
J'ai vu l'aube et l'ombre en mes cieux,  
J'ai connu la pourpre, et la cendre  
Qui me va mieux.

J'ai connu les ardeurs profondes,  
J'ai connu les sombres amours ;  
J'ai vu fuir les ailes, les ondes,  
Les vents, les jours.

J'ai sur ma tête des orfraies ;  
J'ai sur tous mes travaux l'affront,  
Au pied la poudre, au cœur des plaies,  
L'épine au front.

J'ai des pleurs à mon œil qui pense,  
Des trous à ma robe en lambeau ;  
Je n'ai rien à la conscience ;  
Ouvre, tombeau.

Last comes the magnificent and rapturous hymn of universal redemption from suffering as from sin, the prophetic vision of evil absorbed by good, and the very worst of spirits transfigured into the likeness of the very best, in which the daring and indomitable faith of the seer finds dauntless and supreme expression in choral harmonies of unlimited and illimitable hope. The epilogue which dedicates the book to the daughter whose grave was now forbidden ground to her father—so long wont to keep there the autumnal anniversary of his mourning—is the very crown and flower of the immortal work which it inscribes, if we may say so, rather to the presence than to the memory of the dead.

Not till the thirtieth year from the publication of these two volumes was the inexhaustible labour of the

spirit which inspired them to cease for a moment—and then, among us at least, for ever. Three years afterwards appeared the first series of the *Légende des Siècles*, to be followed nineteen years later by the second, and by the final complementary volume six years after that : so that between the inception and the conclusion of the greatest single work accomplished in the course of our century a quarter of that century had elapsed—with stranger and more tragic evolution of events than any poet or any seer could have foretold or foreseen as possible. Three years again from this memorable date appeared the great epic and tragic poem of contemporary life and of eternal humanity which gave us all the slowly ripened fruit of the studies and emotions, the passions and the thoughts, the aspiration and the experience, brought finally to their full and perfect end in *Les Misérables*. As the keynote of *Notre-Dame de Paris* was doom—the human doom of suffering to be nobly or ignobly endured—so the keynote of its author's next romance was redemption by acceptance of suffering and discharge of duty in absolute and entire obedience to the utmost exaction of conscience when it calls for atonement, of love when it calls for sacrifice of all that makes life more endurable than death. It is obvious that no account can here be given of a book which if it required a sentence would require a volume to express the character of its quality or the variety of its excellence—the one unique, the latter infinite as the unique and infinite spirit whose intelligence and whose goodness gave it life.

Two years after *Les Misérables* appeared the magnificent book of meditations on the mission of art in the world, on the duty of human thought towards humanity, inscribed by Victor Hugo with the name of William Shakespeare. To allow that it throws more light on

the greatest genius of our own century than on the greatest genius of the age of Shakespeare is not to admit that it is not rich in valuable and noble contemplations or suggestions on the immediate subject of Shakespeare's work ; witness the admirably thoughtful and earnest remarks on Macbeth, the admirably passionate and pathetic reflections on Lear. The splendid eloquence and the heroic enthusiasm of Victor Hugo never found more noble and sustained expression than in this volume—the spontaneous and inevitable expansion of a projected preface to his son's incomparable translation of Shakespeare. The preface actually prefixed to it is admirable for concision, for insight, and for grave historic humour. It appeared a year after the book which (so to speak) had grown out of it ; and in the same year appeared the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois*. The miraculous dexterity of touch, the dazzling mastery of metre, the infinite fertility in variations on the same air of frolic and thoughtful fancy, would not apparently allow the judges of the moment to perceive or to appreciate the higher and deeper qualities displayed in this volume of lyric idyls. The prologue is a superb example of the power peculiar to its author above all other poets ; the power of seizing on some old symbol or image which may have been in poetic use ever since verse dawned upon the brain of man, and informing it again as with life, and transforming it anew as by fire. Among innumerable exercises and excursions of dainty but indefatigable fancy there are one or two touches of a somewhat deeper note than usual which would hardly be misplaced in the gravest and most ambitious works of imaginative genius. The twelve lines (of four syllables each) addressed *À la belle impérieuse* are such, for example, as none but a great poet of passion, a master of imaginative style, could

by any stroke of chance or at any cost of toil have written :—

L'amour, panique  
De la raison,  
Se communique  
Par le frisson.

Laissez-moi dire,  
N'accordez rien.  
Si je soupire,  
Chantez, c'est bien.

Si je demeure,  
Triste, à vos pieds,  
Et si je pleure,  
C'est bien, riez.

Un homme semble  
Souvent trompeur.  
Mais si je tremble,  
Belle, ayez peur.

The sound of the songs of a whole woodland seems to ring like audible spring sunshine through the adorable song of love and youth rejoicing among the ruins of an abbey :—

Seuls tous deux, ravis, chantants !  
Comme on s'aime !  
Comme on cueille le printemps  
Que Dieu sème !

Quels rires étincelants  
Dans ces ombres  
Pleines jadis de fronts blancs,  
De cœurs sombres !

On est tout frais mariés.  
On s'envoie  
Les charmants cris variés  
De la joie.



Purs ébats mêlés au vent  
 Qui frissonne !  
 Gaîtés que le noir couvent  
 Assaisonne !

On effeuille des jasmins  
 Sur la pierre  
 Où l'abbesse joint ses mains  
 En prière.

Les tombeaux, de croix marqués,  
 Font partie  
 De ces jeux, un peu piqués  
 Par l'ortie.

On se cherche, on se poursuit,  
 On sent croître  
 Ton aube, amour, dans la nuit  
 Du vieux cloître.

On s'en va se becquetant,  
 On s'adore,  
 On s'embrasse à chaque instant,  
 Puis encore,

Sous les piliers, les arceaux,  
 Et les marbres.  
 C'est l'histoire des oiseaux  
 Dans les arbres.

The inexhaustible exuberance of fancies lavished on the study of the natural church, built by the hawthorn and the nettle in the depth of the living wood, with foliage and wind and flowers, leaves the reader not unfit for such reading actually dazzled with delight. In a far different key, the *Souvenir des vieilles guerres* is one of Hugo's most pathetic and characteristic studies of homely and heroic life. The dialogue which follows, between the irony of scepticism and the enthusiasm of reason, on the progressive ascension of mankind, is at

once sublime and subdued in the fervent tranquillity of its final tone : and the next poem, on the so-called ' great age ' and its dwarf of a Cæsar with the sun for a periwig, has in it a whole volume of history and of satire condensed into nine stanzas of four lines of five syllables apiece :—

### LE GRAND SIÈCLE

Ce siècle a la forme  
D'un monstueux char  
Sa croissance énorme  
Sous un nain César,

Son air de prodige,  
Sa gloire qui ment,  
Mêlent le vertige  
A l'écrasement.

Louvois pour ministre,  
Scarron pour griffon,  
C'est un chant sinistre  
Sur un air bouffon.

Sur sa double roue  
Le grand char descend ;  
L'une est dans la boue,  
L'autre est dans le sang.

La mort au carrosse  
Attelle—où va-t-il ?—  
Lavrillière atroce,  
Roquelaure vil.

Comme un geai dans l'arbre  
Le roi s'y tient fier ;  
Son cœur est de marbre,  
Son ventre est de chair.

On a pour sa nuque  
Et son front vermeil  
Fait une perruque  
Avec le soleil.

Il règne et végète,  
 Effrayant zéro  
 Sur qui se projette  
 L'ombre du bourreau.

Ce trône est la tombe ;  
 Et sur le pavé  
 Quelque chose en tombe  
 Qu'on n'a point lavé.

The exquisite poem on the closure of the church already described for the winter is as radiant with humour as with tenderness : and the epilogue responds in cadences of august antiphony to the moral and imaginative passion which imbues with life and fire the magnificent music of the prologue.

In the course of the next four years Victor Hugo published the last two great works which were to be dated from the haven of his exile. It would be the very ineptitude of impertinence for any man's presumption to undertake the classification or registry of his five great romances in positive order of actual merit : but I may perhaps be permitted to say without fear of deserved rebuke that none is to me personally a treasure of greater price than *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*. The splendid energy of the book makes the superhuman energy of the hero seem not only possible but natural, and his triumph over all physical impossibilities not only natural but inevitable. Indeed, when glancing at the animadversions of a certain sort of critics on certain points or passages in this and in the next romance of its author, I am perpetually inclined to address them in the spirit—were it worth while to address them in any wise at all—after the fashion if not after the very phrase of Mirabeau's reply to a less impertinent objector. Victor Hugo's acquaintance with navigation or other sciences may or may not have

been as imperfect as Shakespeare's acquaintance with geography and natural history ; the knowledge of such a man's ignorance or inaccuracy in detail is in either case of exactly equal importance : and the importance of such knowledge is for all men of sense and candour exactly equivalent to zero.

Between the tragedy of Gilliatt and the tragedy of Gwynplaine, Victor Hugo published nothing but the glorious little poem on the slaughter of Mentana, called *La Voix de Guernesey*, and (in the same year) the eloquent and ardent effusion of splendid and pensive enthusiasm prefixed to the manual or guide-book which appeared on the occasion of the international exhibition at Paris three years before the collapse of the government which then kept out of France the Frenchmen most regardful of her honour and their own. In the year preceding that collapse he published *L'Homme qui Rit* ; a book which those who read it aright have always ranked and will always rank among his masterpieces. A year and eight months after the fall of the putative Bonaparte he published the terrible register of *L'Année Terrible*. More sublime wisdom, more compassionate equity, more loyal self-devotion, never found expression in verse of more varied and impassioned and pathetic magnificence. The memorial poem in which Victor Hugo so royally repaid, with praise beyond all price couched in verse beyond all praise, the loyal and constant devotion of Théophile Gautier, bears the date of All Souls' Day in the autumn of 1872. For tenderness and nobility of mingling aspiration and recollection, recollection of combatant and triumphant youth, aspiration towards the serene and sovereign ascension out of age through death, these majestic lines are worthy not merely of eternal record, but far more than that—of a distinct and a distinguished place

among the poems of Victor Hugo. They are not to be found in the *édition ne varietur* : which, I must needs repeat, will have to be altered or modified by more variations than one before it can be accepted as a sufficient or standard edition of the complete and final text. In witness of this I cite the closing lines of a poem now buried in 'the tomb of Théophile Gautier'—a beautiful volume which has long been out of print :—

Ami, je sens du sort la sombre plénitude ;  
J'ai commencé la mort par de la solitude,  
Je vois mon profond soir vaguement s'étoiler.  
Voici l'heure où je vais, aussi moi, m'en aller.  
Mon fil trop long frissonne et touche presque au glaive ;  
Le vent qui t'emporta doucement me soulève,  
Et je vais suivre ceux qui m'aimaient, moi banni.  
Leur œil fixe m'attire au fond de l'infini.  
J'y cours. Ne fermez pas la porte funéraire.

Passons, car c'est la loi ; nul ne peut s'y soustraire ;  
Tout penche ; et ce grand siècle avec tous ses rayons  
Entre en cette ombre immense où, pâles, nous fuyons.  
Oh ! quel farouche bruit font dans le crépuscule  
Les chênes qu'on abat pour le bûcher d'Hercule !  
Les chevaux de la Mort se mettent à hennir,  
Et sont joyeux, car l'âge éclatant va finir ;  
Ce siècle altier qui sut dompter le vent contraire  
Expire . . .—O Gautier, toi, leur égal et leur frère,  
Tu pars après Dumas, Lamartine et Musset.  
L'onde antique est tarie où l'on rajeunissait ;  
Comme il n'est plus de Styx il n'est plus de Jouvence.  
Le dur faucheur avec sa large lame avance  
Pensif et pas à pas vers le reste du blé ;  
C'est mon tour ; et la nuit emplit mon œil troublé  
Qui, devinant, hélas, l'avenir des colombes,  
Pleure sur des berceaux et sourit à des tombes.

Two years after the year of terror, the poet who had made its memory immortal by his record of its changes

and its chances gave to the world his heroic and epic romance of *Quatrevingt-treize*; instinct with all the passion of a deeper and wider chivalry than that of old, and touched with a more than Homeric tenderness for motherhood and childhood. This book was written in the space of five months and twenty-seven days. The next year witnessed only the collection of the second series of his *Actes et Paroles (Pendant l'Exil)*, and the publication of two brief and memorable pamphlets: the one a simple and pathetic record of the two beloved sons taken from him in such rapid succession, the other a terse and earnest plea with the judges who had spared the life of a marshal condemned on a charge of high treason to spare likewise the life of a private soldier condemned for a transgression of military discipline. Most readers will be glad to remember that on this occasion at least the voice of the intercessor was not uplifted in vain. A year afterwards he published the third series of *Actes et Paroles (Depuis l'Exil)*, with a prefatory essay full of noble wisdom, of pungent and ardent scorn, of thoughtful and composed enthusiasm, on the eternal contrast and the everlasting battle between the spirit of clerical Rome and the spirit of republican Paris.

'Moi qu'un petit enfant rend tout à fait stupide,' I do not purpose to undertake a review of *L'Art d'être Grand-père*. It must suffice here to register the fact that the most absolutely and adorably beautiful book ever written appeared a year after the volume just mentioned, and some months after the second series of the *Légende des Siècles*; that there is not a page in it which is not above all possible eulogy or thanksgiving; that nothing was ever conceived more perfect than such poems—to take but a small handful for samples—as *Un manque*, *La sieste*, *Choses du soir*, *Ce*

*que dit le public* (at the Jardin des Plantes or at the Zoological Gardens ; ages of public ranging from five, which is comparatively young, to seven, which is positively old), *Chant sur le berceau*, the song for a round dance of children, *Le pot cassé*, *La mise en liberté*, *Jeanne endormie*, the delicious *Chanson de grand-père*, the glorious *Chanson d'ancêtre*, or the third of the divine and triune poems on the sleep of a little child ; that after reading these—to say nothing of the rest—it seems natural to feel as though no other poet had ever known so fully or enjoyed so wisely or spoken so sweetly and so well the most precious of truths, the loveliest of loves, the sweetest and the best of doctrines.

The first of all to see the light appeared in a magazine which has long ago collapsed under the influence of far other writers than the greatest of the century. Every word of the thirty-eight lines which compose *La Sieste de Jeanne*—if any speech or memory of man endure so long—will be treasured as tenderly by generations as remote from the writer's as now treasure up with thankful wonder and reverence every golden fragment and jewelled spar from the wreck of Simonides or of Sappho. It has all the subtle tenderness which invests the immortal song of Danaë ; and the union of perfect grace with living passion, as it were the suffusion of human flesh and blood with heavenly breath and fire, brings back once again upon our thoughts the name which is above every name in lyric song. There is not one line which could have been written and set where it stands by the hand of any lesser than the greatest among poets. For once even the high priest and even the high priestess of baby-worship who have made their names immortal among our own by this especial and most gracious attribute—even William Blake and Christina Rossetti

for once are distanced in the race of song, on their own sweet ground, across their own peculiar field of Paradise. Not even in the pastures that heard his pipe keep time to the *Songs of Innocence*, or on the 'wet bird-haunted English lawn' set ringing as from nursery windows at summer sunrise to the faultless joyous music and pealing birdlike laughter of her divine *Sing-Song*, has there sounded quite such a note as this from the heaven of heavens in which little babies are adored by great poets, the frailest by the most potent of divine and human kind. And above the work in this lovely line of all poets in all time but one, there sits and smiles eternally the adorable baby who helps us for ever to forget all passing perversities of Christianised socialism or bastard Cæsarism which disfigure and diminish the pure proportions and the noble charm of *Aurora Leigh*. Even the most memorable children born to art in Florence, begotten upon stone or canvas by Andrea del Sarto or by Luca della Robbia's very self, must yield to that one the crown of sinless empire and the palm of powerless godhead which attest the natural mystery of their omnipotence; and which haply may help to explain why no accumulated abominations of cruelty and absurdity which inlay the record of its history and incrust the fabric of its creed can utterly corrode the natal beauty or corrupt the primal charm of a faith which centres at its opening round the worship of a new-born child.

The most accurate and affectionate description that I ever saw or heard given of a baby's incomparable smile, when graciously pleased to permit with courtesy and accept with kindness the votive touch of a reverential finger on its august little cheek, was given long since in the text accompanying a rich and joyous design of childish revel by Richard Doyle. A baby in arms



is there contemplating the riotous delights of its elders, fallen indeed from the sovereign state of infancy, but not yet degenerate into the lower life of adults, with that bland and tacit air of a large-minded and godlike tolerance which the devout observer will not fail to have remarked in the aspect of babies when unvexed and unincensed by any cross accident or any human shortcoming on the part of their attendant ministers. Possibly a hand which could paint that inexpressible smile might not fail also of the ability to render in mere words some sense of the ineffable quality which rests upon every line and syllable of this most divine poem. There are lines in it—but after all this is but an indirect way of saying that it is a poem by Victor Hugo—which may be taken as tests of the uttermost beauty, the extreme perfection, the supreme capacity and charm, to which the language of men can attain. It might seem as if the Fates could not allow two men capable of such work to live together in one time of the world; and that Shelley therefore had to die in his thirtieth year as soon as Hugo had attained his twentieth:—

Elle fait au milieu du jour son petit somme ;  
Car l'enfant a besoin du rêve plus que l'homme,  
Cette terre est si laide alors qu'on vient du ciel !  
L'enfant cherche à revoir Chérubin, Ariel,  
Ses camarades, Puck, Titania, les fées,  
Et ses mains quand il dort sont par Dieu réchauffées.  
Oh ! comme nous serions surpris si nous voyions,  
Au fond de ce sommeil sacré, plein de rayons,  
Ces paradis ouverts dans l'ombre, et ces passages  
D'étoiles qui font signe aux enfants d'être sages,  
Ces apparitions, ces éblouissements !  
Donc, à l'heure où les feux du soleil sont calmants,  
Quand toute la nature écoute et se recueille,  
Vers midi, quand les nids se taisent, quand la feuille  
La plus tremblante oublie un instant de frémir,  
Jeanne a cette habitude aimable de dormir ;

Et la mère un moment respire et se repose,  
 Car on se lasse, même à servir une rose.  
 Ses beaux petits pieds nus dont le pas est peu sûr  
 Dorment ; et son berceau, qu'entoure un vague azur  
 Ainsi qu'une auréole entoure une immortelle,  
 Semble un nuage fait avec de la dentelle ;  
 On croit, en la voyant dans ce frais berceau-là,  
 Voir une lueur rose au fond d'un falbala ;  
 On la contemple, on rit, on sent fuir la tristesse,  
 Et c'est un astre, ayant de plus la petitesse ;  
 L'ombre, amoureuse d'elle, a l'air de l'adorer ;  
 Le vent retient son souffle et n'ose respirer.  
 Soudain, dans l'humble et chaste alcôve maternelle,  
 Versant tout le matin qu'elle a dans sa prunelle,  
 Elle ouvre la paupière, étend un bras charmant,  
 Agite un pied, puis l'autre, et, si divinement  
 Que des fronts dans l'azur se penchent pour l'entendre,  
 Elle gazouille . . . —Alors, de sa voix la plus tendre,  
 Couvant des yeux l'enfant que Dieu fait rayonner,  
 Cherchant le plus doux nom qu'elle puisse donner  
 À sa joie, à son ange en fleur, à sa chimère :  
 —Te voilà réveillée, horreur ! lui dit sa mère.

If the last word on so divine a subject could ever be said, it surely might well be none other than this. But with workmen of the very highest order there is no such thing as a final touch, a point at which they like others are compelled to draw bridle, a summit on which even their genius also may abide but while a man takes breath, and halt without a hope or aspiration to pass beyond it.

Far different in the promise or the menace of its theme, the poet's next work, issued in the following year, was one in spirit with the inner spirit of this book. In sublime simplicity of conception and in sovereign accomplishment of its design, *Le Pape* is excelled by no poem of Hugo's or of man's. In the glory of pure pathos it is perhaps excelled, as in the divine long-suffering of all-merciful wisdom it can be but equalled,

by the supreme utterance of *La Pitié Suprême*. In splendour of changeful music and imperial magnificence of illustration the two stand unsurpassed for ever, side by side. A third poem, attacking at once the misbelief or rather the infidelity which studies and rehearses 'the grammar of assent' to creeds and articles of religion, and the blank disbelief or denial which rejects all ideals and all ideas of spiritual life, is not so rich even in satire as in reason, so earnest even in rejection of false doctrine as in assertion of free belief. Upon this book no one can hope to write anything so nearly adequate and so thoroughly worth reading as is the tribute paid to it by Théodore de Banville—the Simonides Melicertes of France:—

In the midst of our confused life, turbulent and flat, bustling and indifferent, where books and plays, dreams and poems, driven down a wind of oblivion, are like the leaves which November sweeps away, and fly past, without giving us time to tell one from another, in a vague whirl and rush, at times there appears a new book by Victor Hugo, and everything lights up, resounds, murmurs, and sings at once.

'The shining, sounding, fascinating verse, with its thousand surprises of tone, of colour, of harmony, breaks forth like a rich concert, and ever newly stirred, dazzled and astonished, as if we were hearing verses for the first time, we remain stupefied with wonder before the persistent prodigy of the great seer, the great thinker, the unheard-of artist, self-transfigured without ceasing, always new and always like himself. It would be impertinent to say of him that he makes progress; and yet I find no other word to express the fact that every hour, every minute, he adds something new, something yet more exact and yet more caressing, to that swing of syllables, that melodious play of rhyme renascent of itself, which is the grace and the invincible power of French poetry,'—

if English ears could but learn or would but hear it; whereas usually they have never been taught even the

rudiments of French prosody, and receive the most perfect cadences of the most glorious or the most exquisite French poetry as a schoolboy's who has not yet learnt scansion might receive the melodies of Catullus or of Virgil.

' Let me be forgiven a seeming blasphemy ; but since the time of periphrasis is over the real truth of things must be said of them. Well, then, the great peril of poetry is the risk it runs of becoming a weariness : for it may be almost sublime and yet perfectly wearisome : but, on the contrary, with all its bewildering flight, its vast circumference, and the rage of a genius intoxicated with things immeasurable, the poetry of Victor Hugo is of itself *amusing* into the bargain—amusing as a fairy-tale, as a many-coloured festival, as a lawless and charming comedy ; for in it words play unexpected parts, take on themselves a special and intense life, put on strange or graceful faces, clash one against another either cymbals of gold or urns of crystal, exchange flashes of living light and dawn.

' And let no one suspect in my choice of an epithet any idea of diminution ; a garden-box on the window-sill may be thoroughly wearisome, and an immense forest may be amusing, with its shades wherein the nightingale sings, its giant trees with the blue sky showing through them, its mossy shelters where the silver brooklet hums its tune through the moistened greenery. Ay,—this is one of its qualities,—the poetry of Hugo can be read, can be devoured as one devours a new novel, because it is varied, surprising, full of the unforeseen, clear of commonplaces, like nature itself ; and of such a limpid clearness as to be within the reach of every creature who can read, even when it soars to the highest summits of philosophy and idealism. In fact, to be obscure, confused, unintelligible, is not a rare quality nor one difficult to acquire ; and the first fool you may fall in with can easily attain to it. In this magnificent poem which has just appeared—as, for that matter, in all his other poems—what Victor Hugo does is just to dispel and scatter to the winds of heaven those lessons, those fogs, those rubbish-heaps, those clouds of dark bewildered words

with which the sham wise men of all ages have overlaid the plain evidence of truth.'

'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo'; and I, who cannot pretend even to the gift of eloquence proper to the son of Maia, will not presume to add a word of less valuable homage to the choicer tribute of Banville. The three poems last mentioned were respectively published in three successive years: and in the same year with *Religions et Religion* Victor Hugo published a fourth volume, *L'Âne*, in which the questions of human learning and of human training were handled with pathetic ardour and sympathetic irony. It would be superfluous if not insolent to add that the might of hand, the magic of utterance, the sovereign charm of sound and the superb expression of sense, are equal and incomparable in all.

And next year Victor Hugo gave us *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*. In the first division, the book of satire, every page bears witness that the hand which wrote the *Châtiments* had neither lost its strength nor forgotten its cunning; it is full of keen sense, of wise wrath, of brilliant reason and of merciful equity. The double drama which follows is one of the deepest and sweetest and richest in various effect among the masterpieces of its author. In *Margarita* we breathe again the same fresh air of heroic mountain-ranges and woodlands inviolable, of winds and flowers and all fair things and thoughts, which blows through all the brighter and more gracious interludes of the *Légende des Siècles*: the figures of Gallus, the libertine by philosophy, and Gunich, the philosopher of profligacy,—the former a true man and true lover at heart, the latter a cynic and a courtier to the core—are as fresh in their novelty as the figures of noble old age and noble young love are fresh in their renewal and reimpression of types familiar

to all hearts since the sunrise of *Hernani*. The tragedy which follows this little romantic comedy is but the more penetrative and piercing in its pathos and its terror for its bitter and burning vein of realism and of humour. The lyric book is a casket of jewels rich enough to outweigh the whole wealth of many a poet. After the smiling song of old times, the stately song of to-day with its other stars and its other roses, in sight of the shadow where grows the deathless flower of death, pale and haggard, with its shadowy perfume : the song of all sweet waking dreams and visions, and sweetest among them all the vision of a tyrant loyally slain : the song on hearing a princess sing, sweeter than all singing and simple as ' the very virtue of compassion ' : the song of evening, and rest from trouble, and prayer in sorrow, and hope in death : the many-coloured and sounding song of seaside winter nights : the song of three nests, the reed-warbler's and the martlet's made with moss and straw, in the wall or on the water, and love's with glances and smiles, in the lover's inmost heart : the song of the watcher by twilight on the cliff, which strikes a note afterwards repeated and prolonged in the last issue of the *Légende des Siècles*, full of mystery and mourning and fear and faith : the brief deep note of bewildered sorrow that succeeds it : the great wild vision of death and night, cast into words which have the very sound of wind and storm and water, the very shape and likeness of things actually touched or seen : the soft and sublime song of dawn as it rises on the thinker deep sunk in meditation on death and on life to come : the strange dialogue underground, grim and sweet, between the corpse and the rose-tree : the song of exile in May, sweet as flowers and bitter as tears : the lofty poem of suffering which rejects the old Roman refuge of stoic suicide :

the light swift song of a lover's quarrel between the earth and the sun in wintertime : the unspeakably sweet song of the daisy that smiles at coming winter, the star that smiles at coming night, the soul that smiles at coming death : the most pathetic and heroic song of all, the cry of exile towards the graves of the beloved over sea, that weeps and is not weary : the simple and sublime verses on the mountain desolation to which truth and conscience were the guides : the four magnificent studies of sea and land, *Promenades dans les rochers* : the admirable verses on that holy mystery of terror perceptible in the most glorious works alike of nature and of poetry : all these and more are fitly wound up by the noble hymn on planting the oak of the United States of Europe in the garden of the house of exile. A few of the briefer among these may here be taken as examples of a gift not merely unequalled but unapproached by any but the greatest among poets. And first we may choose the following unsurpassable psalm of evensong :—

Un hymne harmonieux sort des feuilles du tremble ;  
Les voyageurs craintifs, qui vont la nuit ensemble,  
Haussent la voix dans l'ombre où l'on doit se hâter.

Laissez tout ce qui tremble  
Chanter.

Les marins fatigués sommeillent sur le gouffre.  
La mer bleue où Vésuve épand ses flots de soufre  
Se tait dès qu'il s'éteint, et cesse de gémir.

Laissez tout ce qui souffre  
Dormir.

Quand la vie est mauvaise on la rêve meilleure.  
Les yeux en pleurs au ciel se lèvent à toute heure ;  
L'espoir vers Dieu se tourne et Dieu l'entend crier.

Laissez tout ce qui pleure  
Prier.

C'est pour renaître ailleurs qu'ici-bas on succombe.  
 Tout ce qui tourbillonne appartient à la tombe.  
 Il faut dans le grand tout tôt ou tard s'absorber.  
     Laissez tout ce qui tombe  
     Tomber !

Next, we may take two songs of earlier and later life,  
 whose contrast is perfect concord :—

## I

## CHANSON D'AUTREFOIS

Jamais elle ne raille,  
 Etant un calme esprit ;  
 Mais toujours elle rit.—  
 Voici des brins de mousse avec des brins de paille ;  
     Fauvette des roseaux,  
     Fais ton nid sur les eaux.

Quand sous la clarté douce,  
 Qui sort de tes beaux yeux,  
 On passe, on est joyeux.—  
 Voici des brins de paille avec des brins de mousse ;  
     Martinet de l'azur,  
     Fais ton nid dans mon mur.

Dans l'aube avril se mire,  
 Et les rameaux fleuris  
 Sont pleins de petits cris.—  
 Voici de son regard, voici de son sourire ;  
     Amour, ô doux vainqueur,  
     Fais ton nid dans mon cœur.

## II

## CHANSON D'AUJOUR'HUI

Je disais :—Dieu qu'aucun suppliant n'importune,  
 Quand vous m'éprouverez dans votre volonté,  
 Laissez mon libre choix choisir dans la fortune  
     L'un ou l'autre côté ;



Entre un riche esclavage et la pauvreté franche  
Laissez-moi choisir, Dieu de cèdre et du roseau ;  
Entre l'or de la cage et le vert de la branche  
Faites juge l'oiseau.—

Maintenant je suis libre et la nuit me réclame ;  
J'ai choisi l'âpre exil ; j'habite un bois obscur ;  
Mais je vois s'allumer les étoiles de l'âme  
Dans mon sinistre azur.

If this can be surpassed for outward and inward sweetness, the following poem may perhaps have been equalled for sensible and spiritual terror in the range of lyric song :—

EN MARCHANT LA NUIT DANS UN BOIS

I

Il grêle, il pleut. Neige et brume ;  
Fondrière à chaque pas.  
Le torrent veut, crie, écume,  
Et le rocher ne veut pas.

Le sabbat à notre oreille  
Jette ses vagues hourras.  
Un fagot sur une vieille  
Passe en agitant les bras.

Passants hideux, clartés blanches ;  
Il semble, en ces noirs chemins,  
Que les hommes ont des branches,  
Que les arbres ont des mains.

II

On entend passer un coche,  
Le lourd coche de la mort.  
Il vient, il roule, il approche.  
L'eau hurle et la bise mord.

Le dur cocher, dans la plaine  
Aux aspects noirs et changeants,  
Conduit sa voiture pleine  
De toute sorte de gens.

Novembre souffle, la terre  
Frémit, la bourrasque fond  
Les flèches du sagittaire  
Sifflent dans le ciel profond.

## III

—Cocher, d'où viens-tu ? dit l'arbre.  
—Où vas-tu ? dit l'eau qui fuit.  
Le cocher est fait de marbre  
Et le coche est fait de nuit.

Il emporte beauté, gloire,  
Joie, amour, plaisirs bruyants ;  
La voiture est toute noire,  
Les chevaux sont effrayants.

L'arbre en frissonnant s'incline.  
L'eau sent les joncs se dresser.  
Le buisson sur la colline  
Grimpe pour le voir passer.

## IV

Le brin d'herbe sur la roche,  
Le nuage dans le ciel,  
Regarde marcher ce coche,  
Et croit voir rouler Babel.

Sur sa morne silhouette,  
Battant de l'aile à grands cris,  
Volent l'orage, chouette,  
Et l'ombre, chauve-souris.

Vent glacé, tu nous secoues !  
Le char roule, et l'œil tremblant,  
À travers ses grandes roues,  
Voit un crépuscule blanc.

## V

La nuit, sinistre merveille,  
Répand son effroi sacré ;  
Toute la forêt s'éveille,  
Comme un dormeur effaré.

Après les oiseaux, les âmes !  
Volez sous les cieux blafards.  
L'étang, miroir, rit aux femmes  
Qui sortent des nénuphars.

L'air sanglote, et le vent râle,  
Et, sous l'obscur firmament,  
La nuit sombre et la mort pâle  
Se regardent fixement

But the twenty-fifth poem in this book of lyrics has assuredly never been excelled since first the impulse of articulate song awoke in the first recorded or unrecorded poet :—

Proscrit, regarde les roses ;  
Mai joyeux, de l'aube en pleurs  
Les reçoit toutes écloses ;  
Proscrit, regarde les fleurs.

—Je pense  
Aux roses que je semai.  
Le mois de mai sans la France,  
Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

Proscrit, regarde les tombes ;  
Mai, qui rit aux cieux si beaux,  
Sous les baisers des colombes  
Fait palpiter les tombeaux.

—Je pense  
Aux yeux chers que je fermai.  
Le mois de mai sans la France,  
Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

Proscrit, regarde les branches,  
Les branches où sont les nids ;  
Mai les remplit d'ailes blanches  
Et de soupirs infinis.

—Je pense  
Aux nids charmants où j'aimai.  
Le mois de mai sans la France,  
Ce n'est pas le mois de mai.

In October of the same year—the second year of his long exile—a loftier note of no less heavenly melody was sounded by the lyric poet who alone of all his nation has taken his place beside Coleridge and Shelley. The word ‘passant,’ as addressed by the soul to the body, is perhaps the very finest expression of his fervent faith in immortality to be found in all the work of Victor Hugo :—

Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle,  
Reine marguerite ; aux champs défleuris  
Bientôt vont souffler le givre et la grêle.  
—Passant, l’hiver vient, et je lui souris.

Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle,  
Etoile du soir ; les rayons taris  
Sont tous retournés à l’aube éternelle.  
—Passant, la nuit vient, et je lui souris.

Il est un peu tard pour faire la belle,  
Mon âme ; joyeuse en mes noirs débris,  
Tu m’éblouis, fière et rouvrant ton aile.  
—Passant, la mort vient, et je lui souris.

No date is affixed to the divine song of yearning after home and the graves which make holier for every man old enough to have been a mourner the native land which holds them. The play on sound which distinguishes the last repetition of the burden is the crowning evidence that the subtlest effect of pathos and the most austere effect of sublimity may be conveyed through a trick of language familiar in their highest and most serious moods to Æschylus and to Shakespeare :—

#### EXIL

Si je pouvais voir, ô patrie,  
Tes amandiers et tes lilas,  
Et fouler ton herbe fleurie,  
Hélas !

Si je pouvais,—mais, ô mon père,  
O ma mère, je ne peux pas,—  
Prendre pour chevet votre pierre,  
Hélas !

Dans le froid cercueil qui vous gêne,  
Si je pouvais vous parler bas,  
Mon frère Abel, mon frère Eugène,  
Hélas !

Si je pouvais, ô ma colombe,  
Et toi, mère, qui t'envolas,  
M'agenouiller sur votre tombe,  
Hélas !

Oh ! vers l'étoile solitaire,  
Comme je lèverais les bras !  
Comme je baiserais la terre,  
Hélas !

Loin de vous, ô morts que je pleure,  
Des flots noirs j'écoute le glas ;  
Je voudrais fuir, mais je demeure,  
Hélas !

Pourtant le sort, caché dans l'ombre,  
Se trompe si, comptant mes pas,  
Il croit que le vieux marcheur sombre  
Est las.

The epic book is the most tragic and terrible of all existing poems of its kind ; if indeed we may say that it properly belongs to any kind existing before its advent. The growing horror of the gradual vision of history, from Henri the Fourth to his bloody and gloomy son, from Louis the Thirteenth to the murderer and hangman of the Palatinate and the Cévennes, from Louis the Fourteenth to the inexpressible pollution of incarnate ignominy in his grandson, seems to heave and swell as a sea towards the coming thunder

which was to break above the severed head of their miserable son.

And next year came *Torquemada* : one of the greatest masterpieces of the master poet of our century. The construction of this tragedy is absolutely original and unique : free and full of change as the wildest and loosest and roughest of dramatic structures ever flung together, and left to crumble or cohere at the pleasure of accident or of luck, by the rudest of primæval playwrights : but perfect in harmonious unity of spirit, in symmetry or symphony of part with part, as the most finished and flawless creation of Sophocles or of Phidias. Between some of the characters in this play and some of those in previous plays of Hugo's there is a certain resemblance as of kinship, but no touch or shadow of mere repetition or reproduction from types which had been used before : Ferdinand the Catholic has something in his lineaments of Louis the Just, and Gucho of L'Angely in *Marion de Lorme* : the marquis of Fuentel has a touch of Gunich in *Les deux trouvaillies de Gallus*, redeemed by a better touch of human tenderness for his recovered grandson. The young lovers are two of the loveliest figures, *Torquemada* is one of the sublimest, in all the illimitable world of dramatic imagination. The intensity of interest, anxiety, and terror, which grows by such rapid and subtle stages of development up to the thunderstroke of royal decision at the close of the first act, is exchanged in the second for an even deeper and higher kind of emotion. The confrontation of the hermit with the inquisitor, magnificent enough already in its singleness of effect, is at once transfigured and completed by the apparition of the tremendous figure whose very name is tragedy, whose very shadow sufficed for the central and the crowning terror which darkened the stage of *Lucrece Borgia*.

LE CHASSEUR. Le hasard a pétri la cendre avec l'instant ;  
Cet amalgame est l'homme. Or, moi-même n'étant  
Comme vous que matière, ah ! je serais stupide  
D'être hésitant et lourd quand la joie est rapide,  
De ne point mordre en hâte au plaisir dans la nuit,  
Et de ne pas goûter à tout, puisque tout fuit !  
Avant tout, être heureux. Je prends à mon service  
Ce qu'on appelle crime et ce qu'on nomme vice.  
L'inceste, préjugé. Le meurtre, expédient.  
J'honore le scrupule en le congédiant.  
Est-ce que vous croyez que, si ma fille est belle,  
Je me gênerai, moi, pour être amoureux d'elle !  
Ah ça, mais je serais un imbécile. Il faut  
Que j'existe. Allez donc demander au gersaut,  
À l'aigle, à l'épervier, si cette chair qu'il broie  
Est permise, et s'il sait de quel nid sort sa proie.  
Parce que vous portez un habit noir ou blanc,  
Vous vous croyez forcé d'être inepte et tremblant,  
Et vous baissez les yeux devant cette offre immense  
Du bonheur, que vous fait l'univers en démençe.  
Ayons donc de l'esprit. Profitons du temps. Rien  
Etant le résultat de la mort, vivons bien !  
La salle de bal croule et devient catacombe.  
L'âme du sage arrive en dansant dans la tombe.  
Servez-moi mon festin. S'il exige aujourd'hui  
Un assaisonnement de poison pour autrui,  
Soit. Qu'importe la mort des autres ! J'ai la vie.  
Je suis une faim, vaste, ardente, inassouvie.  
Mort, je veux t'oublier ; Dieu, je veux t'ignorer.  
Oui, le monde est pour moi le fruit à dévorer.  
Vivant, je suis en hâte heureux ; mort, je m'échappe !  
FRANÇOIS DE PAULE, à *Torquemada*. Qu'est-ce que ce  
bandit ?  
TORQUEMADA. Mon père, c'est le pape.

The third act revives again the more immediate and personal interest of the drama. Terror and pity never rose higher, never found utterance more sublime and piercing, in any work of any poet in the world, than here in the scene of the supplication of the Jews, and the ensuing scene of the triumph of Torquemada.

The Jews enter ; men, women, and children all covered with ashes and clothed in rags, barefoot, with ropes round their necks, some mutilated and made infirm by torture, dragging themselves on crutches or on stumps ; others, whose eyes have been put out, are led by children. And their spokesman pleads thus with the king and the queen of the kingdoms from whence they are to be driven by Christian jurisdiction :—

MOÏSE-BEN-HABIB, *grand rabbin, à genoux.* Altesse de Castille,  
altesse d'Aragon,

Roi, reine ! ô notre maître, et vous, notre maîtresse,  
Nous, vos tremblants sujets, nous sommes en détresse,  
Et, pieds nus, corde au cou, nous prions Dieu d'abord,  
Et vous ensuite, étant dans l'ombre de la mort,  
Ayant plusieurs de nous qu'on va livrer aux flammes,  
Et tout le reste étant chassé, vieillards et femmes,  
Et, sous l'œil qui voit tout du fond du firmament,  
Rois, nous vous apportons notre gémissment.  
Altesse, vos décrets sur nous se précipitent,  
Nous pleurons, et les os de nos pères palpitent ;  
Le sépulcre pensif tremble à cause de vous.  
Ayez pitié. Nos cœurs sont fidèles et doux ;  
Nous vivons enfermés dans nos maisons étroites,  
Humbles, seuls ; nos lois sont très simples et très droites,  
Tellement qu'un enfant les mettrait en écrit.  
Jamais le juif ne chante et jamais il ne rit.  
Nous payons le tribut, n'importe quelles sommes.  
On nous remue à terre avec le pied ; nous sommes  
Comme le vêtement d'un homme assassiné.  
Gloire à Dieu ! Mais faut-il qu'avec le nouveau-né,  
Avec l'enfant qu'on tette, avec l'enfant qu'on sèvre,  
Nu, poussant devant lui son chien, son bœuf, sa chèvre,  
Israël fuie et coure épars dans tous les sens !  
Qu'on ne soit plus un peuple et qu'on soit des passants !  
Rois, ne nous faites pas chasser à coups de piques,  
Et Dieu vous ouvrira des portes magnifiques.  
Ayez pitié de nous. Nous sommes accablés.  
Nous ne verrons donc plus nos arbres et nos blés !  
Les mères n'auront plus de lait dans leurs mamelles !  
Les bêtes dans les bois sont avec leurs femelles,



Les nids dorment heureux sous les branches blottis,  
On laisse en paix la biche allaiter ses petits,  
Permettez-nous de vivre aussi, nous, dans nos caves,  
Sous nos pauvres toits, presque au bain et presque esclaves,  
Mais auprès des cerceux de nos pères ! daignez  
Nous souffrir sous vos pieds de nos larmes baignés !  
Oh ! la dispersion sur les routes lointaines,  
Quel deuil ! Permettez-nous de boire à nos fontaines  
Et de vivre en nos champs, et vous prospérerez.  
Hélas ! nous nous tordons les bras, désespérés !  
Épargnez-nous l'exil, ô rois, et l'agonie  
De la solitude âpre, éternelle, infinie !  
Laissez-nous la patrie et laissez-nous le ciel !  
Le pain sur qui l'on pleure en mangeant est du fiel.  
Ne soyez pas le vent si nous sommes la cendre.  
Voici notre rançon, hélas ! daignez la prendre.  
O rois, protégez-nous. Voyez nos désespoirs.  
Soyez sur nous, mais non comme des anges noirs ;  
Soyez des anges bons et doux, car l'aile sombre  
Et l'aile blanche, ô rois, ne font pas la même ombre.  
Révoquez votre arrêt. Rois, nous vous supplions  
Par vos aïeux sacrés, grands comme les lions,  
Par les tombeaux des rois, par les tombeaux des reines,  
Profonds et pénétrés de lumières sereines,  
Et nous mettons nos cœurs, ô maîtres des humains,  
Nos prières, nos deuils dans les petites mains  
De votre infante Jeanne, innocente, et pareille  
À la fraise des bois où se pose l'abeille.  
Roi, reine, ayez pitié !

After the sublime and inexpressible pathos of this appeal from age and innocence against the most execrable of all religions that ever infected earth and verified hell, it would have been impossible for any poet but one to find expression for the passion of unselfish faith in that infernal creed which should not merely horrify and disgust us. But when Hugo brings before us the figure of the grand inquisitor in contemplation of the supreme act of faith accomplished in defiance of king and queen to the greater glory of God,

for the ultimate redemption of souls else condemned to everlasting torment, the rapture of the terrible redeemer, whose faith is in salvation by fire, is rendered into words of such magical and magnificent inspiration that the conscience of our fancy is wellnigh conquered and convinced and converted for the moment as we read :—

TORQUEMADA.

O fête, ô gloire, ô joie,

La clémence terrible et superbe flamboie !  
 Délivrance à jamais ! Damnés, soyez absous !  
 Le bûcher sur la terre éteint l'enfer dessous.  
 Sois béni, toi par qui l'âme au bonheur remonte,  
 Bûcher, gloire du feu dont l'enfer est la honte,  
 Issue aboutissant au radieux chemin,  
 Porte du paradis ouverte au genre humain,  
 Miséricorde ardente aux caresses sans nombre,  
 Mystérieux rachat des esclaves de l'ombre,  
 Auto-da-fé ! Pardon, bonté, lumière, feu,  
 Vie ! éblouissement de la face de Dieu !  
 Oh ! quel départ splendide et que d'âmes sauvées !  
 Juifs, mécréants, pécheurs, ô mes chères couvées,  
 Un court tourment vous paie un bonheur infini ;  
 L'homme n'est plus maudit, l'homme n'est plus banni ;  
 Le salut s'ouvre au fond des cieux. L'amour s'éveille,  
 Et voici son triomphe, et voici sa merveille !  
 Quelle extase ! entrer droit au ciel ! ne pas languir !

*(Cris dans le brasier.)*

Entendez-vous Satan hurler de les voir fuir ?  
 Que l'éternel forçat pleure en l'éternel bouge !  
 J'ai poussé de mes poings l'énorme porte rouge.  
 Oh ! comme il a grincé lorsque je refermais  
 Sur lui les deux battants hideux, Toujours, Jamais !  
 Sinistre, il est resté derrière le mur sombre.

*(Il regarde le ciel.)*

Oh ! j'ai pansé la plaie effrayante de l'ombre.  
 Le paradis souffrait ; le ciel avait au flanc  
 Cet ulcère, l'enfer brûlant, l'enfer sanglant ;  
 J'ai posé sur l'enfer la flamme bienfaitrice,  
 Et j'en vois dans l'immense azur la cicatrice.  
 C'était ton coup de lance au côté, Jésus-Christ !

Hosanna ! la blessure éternelle guérit.  
Plus d'enfer. C'est fini. Les douleurs sont taries.

*(Il regarde le quemadero.)*

Rubis de la fournaise ! ô braises ! pierreries !  
Flambez, tisons ! brûlez, charbons ! feu souverain,  
Pétile ! luis, bûcher ! prodigieux écrin  
D'étincelles qui vont devenir des étoiles !  
Les âmes, hors des corps comme hors de leurs voiles,  
S'en vont, et le bonheur sort du bain de tourments !  
Splendeur ! magnificence ardente ! flamboiements !  
Satan, mon ennemi, qu'en dis-tu ?

*(En extase.)*

Feu ! lavage

De toutes les noirceurs par la flamme sauvage !  
Transfiguration suprême ! acte de foi !  
Nous sommes deux sous l'œil de Dieu, Satan et moi.  
Deux porte-fourches, lui, moi. Deux maîtres des flammes.  
Lui perdant les humains, moi secourant les âmes ;  
Tous deux bourreaux, faisant par le même moyen  
Lui l'enfer, moi le ciel, lui le mal, moi le bien ;  
Il est dans le cloaque et je suis dans le temple,  
Et le noir tremblement de l'ombre nous contemple.

*(Il se retourne vers les suppliciés.)*

Ah ! sans moi, vous étiez perdus, mes bien-aimés !  
La piscine de feu vous épure enflammés.  
Ah ! vous me maudissez pour un instant qui passe,  
Enfants ! mais tout à l'heure, oui, vous me rendrez grâce  
Quand vous verrez à quoi vous avez échappé ;  
Car, ainsi que Michel-Archange, j'ai frappé ;  
Car les blancs séraphins, penchés au puits de soufre,  
Raillent le monstrueux avortement du gouffre ;  
Car votre hurlement de haine arrive au jour,  
Bégaie, et, stupéfait, s'achève en chant d'amour !  
Oh ! comme j'ai souffert de vous voir dans les chambres  
De torture, criant, pleurant, tordant vos membres,  
Maniés par l'étau d'airain, par le fer chaud !  
Vous voilà délivrés, partez, fuyez là-haut !  
Entrez au paradis !

*(Il se penche et semble regarder sous terre.)*

Non, tu n'auras plus d'âmes !

*(Il se redresse.)*

Dieu nous donne l'appui que nous lui demandâmes,

Et l'homme est hors du gouffre. Allez, allez, allez !  
 À travers l'ombre ardente et les grands feux ailés,  
 L'évanouissement de la fumée emporte  
 Là-haut l'esprit vivant sauvé de la chair morte !  
 Tout le vieux crime humain de l'homme est arraché ;  
 L'un avait son erreur, l'autre avait son péché,  
 Faute ou vice, chaque âme avait son monstre en elle  
 Qui rongait sa lumière et qui mordait son aile ;  
 L'ange expirait en proie au démon. Maintenant  
 Tout brûle, et le partage auguste et rayonnant  
 Se fait devant Jésus dans la clarté des tombes.  
 Dragons, tombez en cendre ; envollez-vous, colombes !  
 Vous que l'enfer tenait, liberté ! liberté !  
 Montez de l'ombre au jour. Changez d'éternité !

The last act would indeed be too cruel for endurance if it were not too beautiful for blame. But not the Inquisition itself was more inevitably inexorable than is the spiritual law, the unalterable and immitigable instinct, of tragic poetry at its highest. Dante could not redeem Francesca, Shakespeare could not rescue Cordelia. To none of us, we must think, can the children of a great poet's divine imagination seem dearer or more deserving of mercy than they seemed to their creator: but when poetry demands their immolation, they must die, that they may live for ever.

Once more, but now for the last time, the world was to receive yet another gift from the living hand of the greatest man it had seen since Shakespeare. Towards the close of his eighty-second year he bestowed on us the crowning volume of his crowning work, the imperishable and inappreciable *Légende des Siècles*. And at the age of eighty-three years, two months, and twenty-six days, he entered into rest for ever, and into glory which can perish only with the memory of all things memorable among all races and nations of mankind.

I have spoken here—and no man can know so well or feel so deeply as myself with what imperfection of

utterance and inadequacy of insight I have spoken—of Victor Hugo as the whole world knew and as all honourable or intelligent men regarded and revered him. But there are those among his friends and mine who would have a right to wonder if no word were here to be said of the unsolicited and unmerited kindness which first vouchsafed to take notice of a crude and puerile attempt to render some tribute of thanks for the gifts of his genius just twenty-three years ago ; of the kindness which was always but too ready to recognise and requite a gratitude which had no claim on him but that of a very perfect loyalty ; of the kindness which many years afterwards received me as a guest under his roof with the welcome of a father to a son. Such matters, if touched on at all, unquestionably should not be dwelt on in public : but to give them no word whatever of acknowledgment at parting would show rather unthankfulness than reserve in one who was honoured so far above all possible hope or merit by the paternal goodness of Victor Hugo.

1885.

## LA LÉGENDE DES SIÈCLES

1883

Chacun a sa manière. Quant à moi, qui parle ici, j'admire tout, comme une brute.—N'espérez donc aucune critique.—Je ne chicane point ces grands bienfaiteurs-là. Ce que vous qualifiez défaut, je le qualifie accent. Je reçois et je remercie.—Ayant eu l'honneur d'être appelé 'niais' par plusieurs écrivains et critiques distingués, je cherche à justifier l'épithète.

THE greatest work of the century is now at length complete. It is upwards of twenty-four years since the first part of it was sent home to France from Guernsey. Eighteen years later we received a second instalment of the yet unexhausted treasure. And here, at the age of eighty-one, the sovereign poet of the world has placed the copingstone on the stateliest of spiritual buildings that ever in modern times has been reared for the wonder and the worship of mankind.

Those only to whom nothing seems difficult because nothing to them seems greater than themselves could find it other than an arduous undertaking to utter some word of not unworthy welcome and thanksgiving when their life is suddenly enriched and brightened by such an addition to its most precious things as the dawn of a whole new world of song—and a world that may hold its own in heaven beside the suns created or evoked by the fiat of Shakespeare or of Dante. To review the *Divine Comedy*, to dispose of *Hamlet* in the course of a leading article, to despatch in a few sentences the question of *Paradise Lost* and its claim to immortality, might seem easy to judges who should feel themselves on a level with the givers of these gifts ; for others it could be none the less difficult to discharge

this office because the gift was but newly given. One minor phase of the difficulty which presents itself is this : the temporary judge, self-elected to pass sentence on any supreme achievement of human power, must choose on which horn of an inevitable dilemma he may prefer to run the risk of impalement. If, recognising in this new master-work an equal share of the highest qualities possible to man with that possessed and manifested by any previous writer of now unquestioned supremacy, he takes upon himself to admit, simply and honestly, that he does recognise this, and cannot choose but recognise it, he must know that his judgment will be received with no more tolerance or respect, with no less irritation and derision, than would have been, in Dante's time, the judgment of a critic who should have ventured to rank Dante above Virgil, in Shakespeare's time of a critic who should have dared to set Shakespeare beside Homer. If, on the other hand, he should abstain with all due discretion from any utterance or any intimation of a truth so ridiculous and untimely, he runs the sure and certain risk of leaving behind him a name to be ranked, by all who remember it at all, with those which no man mentions without a smile of compassion or of scorn, according to the quality of error discernible in the critic's misjudgment : innocent and incurable as the confidence of a Johnson or a Jeffrey, venomous and malignant as the rancour of Sainte-Beuve or Gifford. Of these two dangers I choose the former ; and venture to admit, in each case with equal diffidence, that I do upon the whole prefer Dante to any Cino or Cecco, Shakespeare to all the Greenes and Peeles and Lillys, Victor Hugo to all or any, of their respective times. The reader who has no tolerance for paradox or presumption has therefore fair warning to read no further.

Auguste Vacquerie, of all poets and all men living the most worthy to praise the greatest poet of his century, has put on record long ago, with all the vivid ardour of his admirable style, an experience of which I now am but too forcibly reminded. He was once invited by Victor Hugo to choose among the manuscripts of the master's unpublished work, from the drawers containing respectively some lyric or dramatic or narrative masterpiece, of which among the three kinds he would prefer to have a sample first. Unable to select, he touched a drawer at random, which contained the opening chapters of a yet unfinished story—*Les Misérables*. If it is no less hard to choose where to begin in a notice of the *Légende des Siècles*—to decide what star in all this thronged and living heaven should first attract the direction of our critical telescope—it is on the other hand no less certain that on no side can the telescope be misdirected. From the miraculous music of a legendary dawn, when the first woman felt first within her the movement of her first-born child, to the crowning vision of ultimate justice made visible and material in the likeness of the trumpet of doom, no radiance or shadow of days or nights intervening, no change of light or cadence of music in all the tragic pageant of the centuries, finds less perfect expression and response, less absolute refraction or reflection, than all that come and go before or after it. History and legend, fact and vision, are fused and harmonised by the mastering charm of moral unity in imaginative truth. There is no more possibility of discord or default in this transcendent work of human power than in the working of those powers of nature which transcend humanity. In the first verses of the overture we hear such depth and height of music, see such breadth and splendour of beauty, that we know at once



these cannot but continue to the end ; and from the end, when we arrive at the goal of the last line, we look back and perceive that it has been so. Were this overture but a thought less perfect, a shade less triumphant, we might doubt if what was to follow it could be as perfect and triumphant as itself. We might begin—and indeed, as it is, there are naturally those who have begun—to debate with ourselves or to dispute with the poet as to the details of his scheme, the selection of his types, the propriety of his method, the accuracy of his title. There are those who would seem to infer from the choice of this title that the book is, in the most vulgar sense, of a purely legendary cast ; who object, for example, that a record of unselfish and devoted charity shown by the poor to the poor is, happily, no ‘legend.’ Writers in whom such self-exposure of naked and unashamed ignorance with respect to the rudiments of language is hardly to be feared have apparently been induced or inclined to expect some elaborate and orderly review of history, some versified chronicle of celebrated events and significant epochs, such as might perhaps be of subsidiary or supplementary service in the training of candidates for a competitive examination ; and on finding something very different from this have tossed head and shrugged shoulder in somewhat mistimed impatience, as at some deception or misnomer on the great author’s part which they, as men of culture and understanding, had a reasonable right to resent. The book, they affirm, is a mere agglomeration of unconnected episodes, irrelevant and incoherent, disproportionate and fortuitous, chosen at random by accident or caprice ; it is not one great palace of poetry, but a series or congeries rather of magnificently accumulated fragments. It may be urged in answer to this impeachment that the unity of

the book is not logical but spiritual ; its diversity is not accidental or chaotic, it is the result and expression of a spontaneous and perfect harmony, as clear and as profound as that of the other greatest works achieved by man. To demonstrate this by rule and line of syllogism is no present ambition of mine. A humbler, a safer, and perhaps a more profitable task would be to attempt some flying summary, some glancing revision of the three great parts which compose this mightiest poem of our age ; or rather, if this also should seem too presumptuous an aspiration, to indicate here and there the points to which memory and imagination are most fain to revert most frequently and brood upon them longest, with a deeper delight, a more rapturous reverence, than waits upon the rest. Not that I would venture to assert or to insinuate that there is in any poem of the cycle any note whatever of inferiority or disparity ; but having neither space nor time nor power to speak, however inadequately, of each among the hundred and thirty-eight poems which compose the now perfect book, I am compelled to choose, not quite at random, an example here and there of its highest and most typical qualities. In the first book, for instance, of the first series, the divine poem on Ruth and Boaz may properly be taken as representative of that almost indefinable quality which hitherto has seemed more especially the gift of Dante : a fusion, so to speak, of sublimity with sweetness, the exaltation of loveliness into splendour and simplicity into mystery, such as glorifies the close of his *Purgatory* and the opening of his *Paradise*. Again, the majestic verses which bring Mahomet before us at his end strike a deeper impression into the memory than is left by the previous poem on the raising of Lazarus ; and when we pass into the cycle of heroic or chivalrous legend

we find those poems the loftiest and the loveliest which have in them most of that prophetic and passionate morality which makes the greatest poet, in this as in some other ages, as much a seer as a singer, an evangelist no less than an artist. Hugo, for all his dramatic and narrative mastery of effect, will always probably remind men rather of such poets as Dante or Isaiah than of such poets as Sophocles or Shakespeare. We cannot of course imagine the Florentine or the Hebrew endowed with his infinite variety of sympathies, of interests, and of powers ; but as little can we imagine in the Athenian such height and depth of passion, in the Englishman such unquenchable and sleepless fire of moral and prophetic faith. And hardly in any one of these, though Shakespeare may perhaps be excepted, can we recognise the same buoyant and childlike exultation in such things as are the delight of a high-hearted child—in free glory of adventure and ideal daring, in the triumph and rapture of reinless imagination, which gives now and then some excess of godlike empire and superhuman kingship to their hands whom his hands have created, to the lips whose life is breathed into them from his own. By the Homeric stature of the soul he measures the heroic capacity of the sword. And indeed it is hardly in our century that men who do not wish to provoke laughter should venture to mock at a poet who puts a horde to flight before a hero, or strikes down strongholds by the lightning of a single will. No right and no power to disbelieve in the arm of Hercules or the voice of Jesus can rationally remain with those who have seen Garibaldi take a kingdom into the hollow of his hand, and not one man but a whole nation arise from the dead at the sound of the word of Mazzini.

Two out of the five heroic poems which compose

the fourth book of the first series will always remain types of what the genius of Hugo could achieve in two opposite lines. All the music of morning, all the sunshine of romance, all the sweetness and charm of chivalry, will come back upon all readers at the gracious and radiant name of *Aymerillot* ; all the blackness of darkness, rank with fumes of blood and loud with cries of torment, which covers in so many quarters the history, not romantic but actual, of the ages called ages of faith, will close in upon the memory which reverts to the direful *Day of Kings*. The sound of the final note struck in the latter poem remains in the mind as the echo of a crowning peal of thunder in the ear of one entranced and spell-stricken by the magnetism of storm. The Pyrenees belong to Hugo as the western coasts of Italy, Neapolitan or Tuscan, belong to Shelley ; they can never again be done into words and translated into music as for once they have been by these. It can hardly be said that he who knows the Pyrenees has read Victor Hugo ; but certainly it may be said that he who knows Victor Hugo has seen the Pyrenees. From the author's prefatory avowal that his book contains few bright or smiling pictures, a reader would never have inferred that so many of its pages are fragrant with all the breath and radiant with all the bloom of April or May among the pine-woods and their mountain lawns, ablaze with ardent blossom and astir with triumphant song. Tragedy may be hard at hand, with all the human train of sorrows and passions and sins ; but the glory of beauty, the loveliness of love, the exultation of noble duty and lofty labour in a stress of arduous joy, these are the influences that pervade the world and permeate the air of the poems which deal with the Christian cycle of heroic legend, whose crowning image is the ideal

figure of the Cid. To this highest and purest type of mediæval romance or history the fancy of the great poet whose childhood was cradled in Spain turns and returns throughout the course of his threefold masterpiece with an almost national pride and passion of sublime delight. Once in the first part and once in the third his chosen hero is set before us in heroic verse, doing menial service for his father in his father's house, and again, in a king's palace, doing for humanity the sovereign service of tyrannicide. But in the second part it seems as though the poet could hardly, with his fullest effusion of lyric strength and sweetness, do enough to satisfy his loving imagination of the perfect knight, most faithful and most gentle and most terrible, whom he likens even to the very Pic du Midi in its majesty of solitude. Each fresh blast of verse has in it the ring of a golden clarion which proclaims in one breath the honour of the loyal soldier and the dishonour of the disloyal king. There can hardly be in any language a more precious and wonderful study of technical art in verse of the highest kind of simplicity than this *Romancero du Cid*, with its jet of luminous and burning song sustained without lapse or break through sixteen 'fyttes' of plain brief ballad metre. It is hard to say whether the one only master of all forms and kinds of poetry that ever left to all time the proof of his supremacy in all has shown most clearly by his use of its highest or his use of its simplest forms the innate and absolute equality of the French language as an instrument for poetry with the Greek of Æschylus and of Sappho, the English of Milton and of Shelley.

But among all Hugo's romantic and tragic poems of mediæval history or legend the two greatest are in my mind *Eviradnus* and *Ratbert*. I cannot think it would be rash to assert that the loveliest love-song in the

world, the purest and keenest rapture of lyric fancy, the sweetest and clearest note of dancing or dreaming music, is that which rings for ever in the ear which has once caught the matchless echo of such lines as these that must once more be quoted, as though all the world of readers had not long since known them by heart :—

Viens, sois tendre, je suis ivre.  
O les verts taillis mouillés !  
Ton souffle te fera suivre  
Des papillons réveillés.

Allons-nous-en par l'Autriche !  
Nous aurons l'aube à nos fronts ;  
Je serai grand, et toi riche,  
Puisque nous nous aimerons.

Tu seras dame, et moi comte ;  
Viens, mon cœur s'épanouit,  
Viens, nous conterons ce conte  
Aux étoiles de la nuit.

The poet would be as sure of a heavenly immortality in the hearts of men as any lyrist of Greece itself, who should only have written the fourteen stanzas of the song from which I have ventured to choose these three. All the sounds and shadows of a moonlit wilderness, all the dews and murmurs and breaths of midsummer midnight, have become for once articulate in such music as was never known even to Shakespeare's forest of Arden. In the heart of a poem so full of tragedy and terror that Hugo alone could have brightened it with his final touch of sunrise, this birdlike rapture breaks out as by some divine effect of unforbidden and blameless magic.

And yet, it may be said or thought, the master of masters has shown himself even greater in *Ratbert* than in *Eviradnus*. This most tragic of poems, lit up by

no such lyric interlude, stands unsurpassed even by its author for tenderness, passion, divine magnificence of righteous wrath, august and pitiless command of terror and pity. From the kingly and priestly conclave of debaters more dark than Milton's to the superb admonition of loyal liberty in speech that can only be silenced by murder, and again from the heavenly and heroic picture of childhood worshipped by old age to the monstrous banquet of massacre, when the son of the prostitute has struck his perjured stroke of state, the poem passes through a change of successive pageants each fuller of splendour and wonder, of loveliness or of horror, than the last. But the agony of the hero over the little corpse of the child murdered with her plaything in her hand—the anguish that utters itself as in peal upon peal of thunder, broken by sobs of storm—the full crash of the final imprecation, succeeded again by such unspeakably sweet and piteous appeal to the little dead lips and eyes that would have answered yesterday—and at last the one crowning stroke of crime which calls down an answering stroke of judgment from the very height of heaven, for the comfort and refreshment and revival of all hearts—these are things of which no praise can speak aright. Shakespeare only, were he living, would be worthy to write on Hugo's *Fabrice* as Hugo has written on Shakespeare's *Lear*. History will forget the name of Bonaparte before humanity forgets the name of Ratbert.

But if this be the highest poem of all for passion and pathos and fire of terrible emotion, the highest in sheer sublimity of imagination is to my mind *Zim-Zizimi*. Again and again, in reading it for the first time, one thinks that surely now the utmost height is reached, the utmost faculty revealed, that can be possible for a spirit clothed only with human powers, armed only

gods ; for the wild profound revolt of riotous and trampled nature, the agony and passion and triumph of invincible humanity, the protest and witness of enduring earth against the passing shades of heaven, the struggle and the plea of eternal manhood against all transient forces of ephemeral and tyrannous god-head. Within the orbit of this epicycle one poem only of the first part, a star of strife and struggle, can properly be said to revolve ; but the light of that planet has fire enough to animate with its reflex the whole concourse of stormy stars which illuminate the world-wide wrestle of the giants with the gods. The torch of revolt borne by the transfigured satyr, eyed like a god and footed like a beast, kindles the lamp of hopeful and laborious rebellion which dazzles us in the eye of the Titan who has seen beyond the world. In the song that struck silence through the triumph of amazed Olympus there is a sound and air as of the sea or the Book of Job. There may be something of Persian or Indian mysticism, there is more of universal and unimaginative reason, in the great allegoric myth which sets forth here how the half-brute child of one poor planet has in him the seed, the atom, the principle of life everlasting, and dilates in force of it to the very type and likeness of the eternal universal substance which is spirit or matter of life ; and before the face of his transfiguration the omnipresent and omnipotent gods who take each their turn to shine and thunder are all but shadows that pass away. Since the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind no ear has heard the burst of such a song ; but this time it is the world that answers out of its darkness the lords and gods of creed and oracle, who have mastered and have not made it. And in the cry of its protest and the prophecy of its advance there is a storm of swelling music



which is as the sound of the strength of rollers after the noise of the rage of breakers.

It is noticeable that the master of modern poets should have in the tone and colour of his genius more even of the Hebrew than the Greek. In his love of light and freedom, reason and justice, he is not of Jerusalem, but of Athens; but in the bent of his imagination, in the form and colour of his dreams, in the scope and sweep of his wide-winged spiritual flight, he is nearer akin to the great insurgent prophets of deliverance and restoration than to any poet of Athens except only their kinsman Æschylus. It is almost wholly of the Persian war, the pass of Thermopylæ, the strait of Euripus, that he sings when he sings of Hellas. All his might of hand, all his cunning of colour, all his measureless resources of sound and form and symbol, are put forth in the catalogue of nations and warriors subject to Xerxes. There is nothing in poetry so vast and tremendous of its kind as this pageant of immense and monstrous invasion. But indeed the choice of gigantic themes, the predominance of colossal effects, the prevalence of superhuman visions over the types and figures of human history or legend, may be regarded as a distinctive point of difference between the second and the first series. A typical example of the second is the poem which has added an eighth wonder built by music to the seven wonders of the world, which it celebrates in verse more surely wrought for immortality than they. Another is the song of the worm which takes up in answer to their chant of life and light and pride of place, and prolongs through measure after measure of rolling and reverberating verse, the note of a funereal and universal triumph, the protest and the proclamation of death. Another, attuned to that mighty music

of meditation which rings through so many of the poems written in exile and loneliness, is the stately prophetic hymn which bears the superscription of *All the Past and all the Future*. This might seem to belong to the sixth book of the *Contemplations*, in which the same note of proud and ardent faith was struck so often with such sovereignty of hand. As much might be said of the great 'abysmal' poem which closes the second series with a symphony of worlds and spirits. Other groups of poems, in like manner, bear signs of common or of diverse kinship to former works of a creator whose spirit has put life into so many of the same likeness, yet with no more sign of repetition or weary monotony than is traceable in the very handiwork of nature. The book of idyls is of one inspiration with the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois*; in both cases, as in so many of the poet's earlier lyric volumes, his incomparable fertility of speech and superb facility of verse leave almost an impression as of work done by way of exercise, as though he were writing to keep his hand in, or to show for a wager with incredulous criticism how long he could keep up the golden ball of metre, carve arabesques of the same pattern, play variations in the same key. But the *Old Man's Idyl* which closes the book belongs by kinship to another work of the poet's, more beloved and more precious to the inmost heart, if not more eminent for strength and cunning of hand, than any of these. In 'the voice of a child a year old' there is the same welling and bubbling melody which flows and laughs and murmurs and glitters through the adorable verses of *L'Art d'être Grand-père*, making dim with love and delight the reader's or the hearer's eyes. At last the language of babies has found its interpreter; and that, as might have been expected, in the greatest poet of his age:—

L'enfant apporte un peu de ce ciel dont il sort ;  
Il ignore, il arrive ; homme, tu le recueilles.  
Il a le tremblement des herbes et des feuilles.  
La jaserie avant le langage est la fleur  
Qui précède le fruit, moins beau qu'elle, et meilleur,  
Si c'est être meilleur qu'être plus nécessaire.

A conclusion which may be doubted when we consider as follows :—

L'enfant fait la demande et l'ange la réponse ;  
Le babil puéril dans le ciel bleu s'enfoncé,  
Puis s'en revient, avec les hésitations  
Du moineau qui verrait planer les alcyons.

Can language or can thought be lovelier ? if so, the one possible instance is to be sought in these succeeding verses :—

Quand l'enfant jase avec l'ombre qui le bénit,  
La fauvette, attentive, au rebord de son nid  
Se dresse, et ses petits passent, pensifs et frêles,  
Leurs têtes à travers les plumes de ses ailes ;  
La mère semble dire à sa couvée : Entends,  
Et tâche de parler aussi bien.

It seems and is not strange that the lips which distil such honey as this should be the same so often touched with a coal of fire from that 'altar of Righteousness' where Æschylus was wont to worship. The twenty-first section of the second series is in the main a renewal or completion of the work undertaken in the immortal *Châtiments*. Even in that awful and incomparable book of judgment such poems as *La Colère du Bronze*, and the two following on the traffic of servile clerical rapacity in matters of death and burial, would have stood high among the stately legions of satire which fill its living pages with the sound and the splendour of righteous battle for the right ; but the verses with which Hugo has branded the betrayer of

Metz and Strasburg are hardly to be matched except by those with which, half a century ago, he branded the betrayer of the Duchess of Berry. Truly may all who read them cry out with the poet at their close,

Et qui donc maintenant dit qu'il s'est évadé ?

In *Le Cimetière d'Eylau*, a poem to which we have now in the third series of the book a most noble and exquisite pendant (*Paroles de mon Oncle*), all the Homeric side of a poet born of warlike blood comes out into proud and bright relief. There is no better fighting in the Iliad ; it has the martial precision and practical fellow-feeling which animate in his battle-pieces the lagging verse of Walter Scott ; and it has of course that omnipresent breath and light and fire of perfect poetry which a Scott or a Byron is never quite permitted to attain. Beside or even above these two poems, that other which commemorates the devotion of a Vendean peasant chief will be set in the hearts of all readers competent to appreciate either heroic action or heroic song.

The love of all high things which finds one form of expression in warlike sympathy with warriors who can live and die for something higher than personal credit or success takes another and as natural a shape in the poems which are inspired by love and worship of nature and her witness for liberty and purity and truth in the epic evangel of august and indomitable mountains. The sublimest cry of moral passion ever inspired by communion in spirit with these is uttered in the great poem on the Swiss mercenaries of the seventeenth century, which even among its fellows stands out eminent and radiant as an Alp at sunrise. Mountain and cataract, the stars and the snows, never yet in any language found such a singer and interpreter

as this. Two or three verses, two or three words, suffice for him to bring before us, in fresh and actual presence, the very breath of the hills or the sea, the very lights and sounds and spaces of clouded or sunlit air. Juvenal is not so strong in righteousness, nor Pindar so sublime in illustration, as the poet who borrowed from nature her highest symbols to illustrate the glory and the duty of righteous wrath and insuppressible insurrection against wrongdoing, when he wrote *Le Régiment du baron Madruce* :—

L'homme s'est vendu. Soit. A-t-on dans le louage  
 Compris le lac, le bois, la ronce, le nuage ?  
 La nature revient, germe, fleurit, dissout,  
 Féconde, croît, décroît, rit, passe, efface tout.  
 La Suisse est toujours là, libre. Prend-on au piège  
 Le précipice, l'ombre et la bise et la neige ?  
 Signe-t-on des marchés dans lesquels il soit dit  
 Que l'Orteler s'enrôle et devient un bandit ?  
 Quel poing cyclopéen, dites, ô roches noires,  
 Pourra briser la Dent de Morcle en vos mâchoires ?  
 Quel assembleur de bœufs pourra forger un joug  
 Qui du pic de Glaris aille au piton de Zoug ?  
 C'est naturellement que les monts sont fidèles  
 Et purs, ayant la forme âpre des citadelles,  
 Ayant reçu de Dieu des créneaux où, le soir,  
 L'homme peut, d'embrasure en embrasure, voir  
 Étinceler le fer de lance des étoiles.  
 Est-il une araignée, aigle, qui dans ses toiles  
 Puisse prendre la trombe et la rafale et toi ?  
 Quel chef recrutera le Salève ? à quel roi  
 Le Mythen dira-t-il : ' Sire, je vais descendre !  
 Qu'après avoir dompté l'Athos, quelque Alexandre,  
 Sorte de héros monstre aux cornes de taureau,  
 Aille donc relever sa robe à la Jungfrau !  
 Comme la vierge, ayant l'ouragan sur l'épaule,  
 Crachera l'avalanche à la face du drôle !

Non, rien n'est mort ici. Tout grandit, et s'en vante.  
 L'Helvétie est sacrée, et la Suisse est vivante ;

Ces monts sont des héros et des religieux ;  
Cette nappe de neige aux plis prodigieux  
D'où jaillit, lorsqu'en mai la tiède brise ondoie,  
Toute une floraison folle d'air et de joie,  
Et d'où sortent des lacs et des flots murmurants,  
N'est le linceul de rien, excepté des tyrans.

This glorious poem of the first series finds a glorious echo in the twenty-fifth division of the second ; even as the Pyrenean cycle which opened in the first series is brought in the second to fuller completion of equal and corresponsive achievement. It is wonderful, even in this vast world of poetic miracle where nothing is other than wonderful, that *Masferrer* should be equal to *Aymerillot* in frank majesty of beauty ; that even after *Le Parricide* a fresh depth of tragic terror should be sounded by *Gaiffer-Jorge* ; and that after all he had already written on fatherhood and sonship, on duty and chivalry, on penitence and pride, Victor Hugo should have struck so new and so profound a note as rings in every line of *La Paternité*.

But of all echoes and of all responses which reverberate from end to end of these three great sections of song, the very sweetest, and perhaps the very deepest, are those evoked by love of little children and compassionate reverence for the poor. If but one division were to be left us out of all the second series, and fate or chance, comparatively compassionate in its cruelty, gave us our choice which this one should be, the best judgments might perhaps decide to preserve the twenty-third at all events. What the words 'realism' and 'naturalism' do naturally and really signify in matters of art, the blatant babblers who use them to signify the photography of all things abject might learn, if shallow insolence and unclean egotism were suddenly made capable of learning, by the study of only the two poems

which set before us in two different forms the strength of weakness in the child whose love redeems his father from death and the child who can find no comfort but in death for the lack of a father's love. There is nothing in Homer, in Dante, or in Shakespeare, the three only poets who can properly be cited for comparison, of a pathos more poignant in its bitter perfection of sweetness.

Among the many good things which seem, for the lovers of poetry, to have come out of one and so great an evil as the long exile of Hugo from his country, there is none better or greater than the spiritual inhalation of breeze and brine into the very heart of his genius, the miraculous impregnation of his solitary Muse by the sea-wind. This influence could not naturally but combine with the lifelong influence of all noble sympathies to attract his admiration and his pity towards the poor folk of the shore, and to produce from that sense of compassion for obscurer sorrows and brotherhood with humbler heroism than his own such work as the poem which describes the charity of a fisherman's wife towards the children of her dead neighbour. It has all the beautiful precision and accurate propriety of detail which distinguish the finest idyls of Theocritus or Tennyson, with a fervour of pathetic and imaginative emotion which Theocritus never attained, and which Tennyson has attained but once. All the horror of death, all the trouble and mystery of darkness, seem as we read to pass into our fancy with the breath of pervading night, and to vanish with the husband's entrance at sunrise before the smile with which the wife draws back the curtains of the cradle.

This poem, which so many hearts must have treasured among their choicest memories for now so

many years, has found at length its fellow in the final volume of the book. There is even more savour of the sea in the great lyric landscape called *Les paysans au bord de la mer* than in the idyllic interior called *Les pauvres gens*. There we felt the sea-wind and saw the sea-mist through the chinks of door and window ; but here we feel all the sweep of the west wind's wings, and see all the rush of rain along the stormy shore that the flock of leaping waves has whitened with the shreadings of their fleece. We remember in *Les Voix Intérieures* the all but matchless music of the song of the sea-wind's trumpet, and in the notes of this new tune we find at last that music matched and deepened and prolonged. In the great lyric book which gives us the third of the four blasts blown from *Les Quatre Vents de l'Esprit*, there are visions as august and melodies as austere as this ; but outside the vast pale of the master's work we should look for the likeness of such songs in vain. The key of all its tenderness if not of all its terror is struck in these two first verses :—

Les pauvres gens de la côte,  
L'hiver, quand la mer est haute  
Et qu'il fait nuit,  
Viennent où finit la terre  
Voir les flots pleins de mystère  
Et pleins de bruit.

Ils sondent la mer sans bornes ;  
Ils pensent aux écueils mornes  
Et triomphants ;  
L'orpheline pâle et seule  
Crie : ô mon père ! et l'aïeule  
Dit : mes enfants !

The verses which translate the landscape are as absolutely incomparable in their line as those which



render the emotion of the watchers. Witness this :—

Et l'on se met en prières,  
Pendant que joncs et bruyères  
Et bois touffus,  
Vents sans borne et flots sans nombre,  
Jettent dans toute cette ombre  
Des cris confus.

Here, as usual, it is the more tragic aspect of the waters that would appear to have most deeply impressed the sense or appealed to the spirit of Victor Hugo. He seems to regard the sea with yet more of awe than of love, as he may be said to regard the earth with even more of love than of awe. He has put no song of such sweet and profound exultation, such kind and triumphant motherhood, into the speaking spirit of the sea as into the voice of the embodied earth. He has heard in the waves no word so bountiful and benignant as the message of such verses as these :—

La terre est calme auprès de l'océan grondeur ;  
La terre est belle ; elle a la divine pudeur  
De se cacher sous les feuillages ;  
Le printemps son amant vient en mai la baiser ;  
Elle envoie au tonnerre altier pour l'apaiser  
La fumée humble des villages.

Ne frappe pas, tonnerre. Ils sont petits, ceux-ci.  
La terre est bonne ; elle est grave et sévère aussi ;  
Les roses sont pures comme elle ;  
Quiconque pense, espère et travaille lui plaît ;  
Et l'innocence offerte à tout homme est son lait,  
Et la justice est sa mamelle.

La terre cache l'or et montre les moissons ;  
Elle met dans le flanc des fuyantes saisons  
Le germe des saisons prochaines,  
Dans l'azur les oiseaux qui chuchotent : aimons !  
Et les sources au fond de l'ombre, et sur les monts  
L'immense tremblement des chênes.

The loving loveliness of these divine verses is in sharp contrast with the fierce resonance of those in which the sea's defiance is cast as a challenge to the hopes and dreams of mankind :—

Je suis la vaste mêlée,  
Reptile, étant l'onde, ailée,  
Étant le vent ;  
Force et fuite, haine et vie,  
Houle immense, poursuivie  
Et poursuivant.

The motion of the sea was never till now so perfectly done into words as in these three last lines ; but any one to whom the water was as dear as or dearer than the land at its loveliest would have found a delight as of love no less conceivable than a passion as of hatred in the more visible and active life of waves, and at least as palpable to the 'shaping spirit of imagination.' It remains true, after all, for the greatest as for the humblest, that—in the words of one of the very few poets whose verses are fit to quote even after a verse of Hugo's—

we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone doth nature live ;

so far, at least, as her life concerns us, and is perceptible or appreciable by our spirit or our sense. A magnificent instance of purely dramatic vision, in which the lyric note is tempered to the circumstance of the speakers with a kind of triumphant submission and severe facility, is *La Chanson des Doreurs de Proues*. The poet's unequalled and unapproached variety in mastery of metre and majesty of colour and splendid simplicity of style, no less exact than sublime, and no less accurate than passionate, could hardly be better shown than by comparison of the opening verses with the stanza cited above :—

Nous sommes les doreurs de proues.  
Les vents, tournant comme des roues,  
Sur la verte rondeur des eaux  
Mêlent les lucurs et les ombres,  
Et dans les plis des vagues sombres  
Traînent les obliques vaisseaux.

La bourrasque décrit des courbes,  
Les vents sont tortueux et fourbes,  
L'archer noir souffle dans son cor,  
Ces bruits s'ajoutent aux vertiges,  
Et c'est nous qui dans ces prodiges  
Faisons rôder des spectres d'or.

Car c'est un spectre que la proue.  
Le flot l'étreint, l'air la secoue ;  
Fière, elle sort de nos bazars  
Pour servir aux éclairs de cible,  
Et pour être un regard terrible  
Parmi les sinistres hasards.

It is more than fifty years since *Les Orientales* rose radiant upon the world of letters, and the hand which gave them to mankind has lost so little of its cunning that we are wellnigh tempted to doubt whether then, for all its skill and sureness of touch, it had quite the same strength and might of magnificent craftsmanship as now. There was fire as well as music on the lips of the young man, but the ardour of the old man's song seems even deeper and keener than the passion of his past. The fervent and majestic verses of June 2, 1883, strike at starting the note of measureless pity and immeasurable indignation which rings throughout the main part of the fifth and last volume almost louder and fuller, if possible, than it was wont. All Victor Hugo, we may say, is in this book ; it is as one of those ardent evening skies in which sunrise and sunset seem one in the flush of overarching colour which glows back from the west to the east with reverberating bloom and fervour of rose-blossom and fire. There is life enough

in it, enough of the breath and spirit and life-blood of living thought, to vivify a whole generation of punier souls and feebler hearts with the heat of his fourscore years. It may be doubted whether there ever lived a poet and leader of men to whom these glorious verses would be so closely applicable as to their writer :—

Un grand esprit en marche a ses rumeurs, ses houles,  
Ses chocs, et fait frémir profondément les foules,  
Et remue en passant le monde autour de lui.  
On est épouvanté si l'on n'est ébloui ;  
L'homme comme un nuage erre et change de forme ;  
Nul, si petit qu'il soit, échappe au souffle énorme ;  
Les plus humbles, pendant qu'il parle, ont le frisson.  
Ainsi quand, évadé dans le vaste horizon,  
L'aquilon qui se hâte et qui cherche aventure  
Tord la pluie et l'éclair, comme de sa ceinture  
Une fille défait en souriant le nœud,  
Quand l'immense vent gronde et passe, tout s'émeut,  
Pas un brin d'herbe au fond des ravins, que ne touche  
Cette rapidité formidable et farouche.

And this wind 'bloweth where it listeth': now it comes to us charged with all the heart of all the roses in the world ; its breath when it blows towards Greece has in it a murmur as of Shelley's *Epipsychidion* ; the caress of its love-making has all the freedom and all the purity of Blake's ; now it passes by us in darkness, from depth to depth of the bitter mystery of night. A vision of ruined worlds, the floating purgatorial prisons of ruined souls, adrift as hulks on the sea of darkness everlasting, shows us the harvest in eternity of such seed as was sown in time by the hands of such guides and rulers of men as we hear elsewhere speaking softly with each other in the shadows, within hail of the confessional and the scaffold. The loftiest words of counsel sound sweeter in the speech of this great spirit than the warmest whispers of pleasure ; and again, the

heaviest stroke of damning satire is succeeded by the tenderest touch of a compassion that would leave not a bird in captivity. The hand that opens the cage-door is the same which has just turned the key on the braggart swordsman, neither 'victorious' nor 'dead,' but condemned to everlasting prison behind the bars of iron verse.

But the two long poems which dominate the book, like two twin summits clothed round with fiery cloud and crowned with stormy sunshine, tower equal in height and mass of structure with the stateliest in the two parts preceding. The voice that rolls throughout *Les Quatre Jours d'Elciis* the thunder of its burning words reawakens and prolongs the echo of Félibien's pity and wrath over the murdered corpse of a child unborn; we recognise in the speaker a kinsman of Welf's, the unconquerable old castellan of Osbor, delivered only by an act of charity into the treacherous hands of the princes whom his citadel had so long defied. Of Elciis, as of him, the poet might have said :—

Si la mer prononçait des noms dans ses marées,  
O vieillard, ce serait des noms comme le tien.

Such names will no doubt provoke the soft superior smile of a culture too refined for any sort of enthusiasm but the elegant ecstasy of self-worship; and such simplicity will excite, on the other hand, a deep-mouthed bray of scorn from the whole school or church whose apostle in France was St. Joseph de Maistre, in England St. Thomas Coproston, late of Craigenputtock and Chelsea; the literary lappers of imaginary blood, the inkhorn swordsmen and spokesmen of immaterial iron. The rage of their contempt for such as Hugo, the loathing of their scorn for such as Shelley,

mouth. The brazen clatter of Byron's *Prophecy* was not redeemed or brought into tune by the noble energy and sound insight of the political sympathies expressed in the accent of a stump-orator to the tune of a barrel-organ. But a verse of Hugo's falls often as solid and weighty and sure, as full in significance of perfect and pregnant sound, as even a verse of Alighieri's. He therefore, but he alone, had the power and the right to call up the spirit of Dante now thirty years ago, and bid it behold all the horrors of Europe in 1853 ; the Europe of Haynau and Radetzky, of Nicholas the First and Napoleon the Last. Any great modern poet's notion of an everlasting hell must of course be less merely material than Dante's mechanism of hot and cold circles, fire and ice, ordure and mire ; but here is the same absolute and equitable assent to justice, the same fierce and ardent fidelity to conscience, the same logic and the same loyalty as his :—

O sentence ! ô peine sans refuge !  
 Tomber dans le silence et la brume à jamais !  
 D'abord quelque clarté des lumineux sommets  
 Vous laisse distinguer vos mains désespérées.  
 On tombe, on voit passer des formes effarées,  
 Bouches ouvertes, fronts ruisselants de sueur,  
 Des visages hideux qu'éclaire une lueur.  
 Puis on ne voit plus rien. Tout s'efface et recule.  
 La nuit morne succède au sombre crépuscule.  
 On tombe. On n'est pas seul dans ces limbes d'en bas ;  
 On sent frissonner ceux qu'on ne distingue pas ;  
 On ne sait si ce sont des hydres ou des hommes ;  
 On se sent devenir les larves que nous sommes ;  
 On entrevoit l'horreur des lieux inaperçus,  
 Et l'abîme au-dessous, et l'abîme au-dessus.  
 Puis tout est vide ! on est le grain que le vent sème.  
 On n'entend pas le cri qu'on a poussé soi-même ;  
 On sent les profondeurs qui s'emparent de vous ;  
 Les mains ne peuvent plus atteindre les genoux ;  
 On lève au ciel les yeux et l'on voit l'ombre horrible ;

On est dans l'impalpable, on est dans l'invisible ;  
Des souffles par moments passent dans cette nuit.  
Puis on ne sent plus rien.—Pas un vent, pas un bruit,  
Pas un souffle ; la mort, la nuit ; nulle rencontre ;  
Rien, pas même une chute affreuse ne se montre :  
Et l'on songe à la vie, au soleil, aux amours,  
Et l'on pense toujours, et l'on tombe toujours !

The resurrection of the victims to give evidence at the summons of the archangel—a heavy cloud of witnesses,

Triste, livide, énorme, ayant un air de rage—

men bound to the yoke like beasts, women with bosoms gashed by the whip, children with their skulls cleft open—is direful as any less real and actual vision of the elder hell :—

Les cris d'enfant surtout venaient à mon oreille ;  
Car, dans cette nuit-là, gouffre où l'équité veille,  
La voix des innocents sur toute autre prévaut,  
C'est le cri des enfants qui monte le plus haut,  
Et le vagissement fait le bruit du tonnerre.

The appeal for justice which follows, with its enumeration of horrors unspeakable except by history and poetry, is followed in its turn by the evocation of the soldiers whom this army of martyrs has with one voice designated to the angel of judgment as their torturers and murderers. The splendid and sonorous verses in which the muster of these legions after legions, with their garments rolled in blood, is made to defile before the eyes of reader or hearer, can be matched only by the description of the Swiss mercenaries in *Le Régiment du baron Madruce* :—

Un grand vautour doré les guidait comme un phare.  
Tant qu'ils étaient au fond de l'ombre, la fanfare,  
Comme un aigle agitant ses bruyants ailerons,  
Chantait claire et joyeuse au front des escadrons,

Trompettes et tambours sonnaient, et des centaures  
Frappaient des ronds de cuivre entre leurs mains sonores ;  
Mais, dès qu'ils arrivaient devant le flamboiement,  
Les clairons effarés se taisaient brusquement,  
Tout ce bruit s'éteignait. Reculant en désordre,  
Leurs chevaux se cabraient et cherchaient à les mordre,  
Et la lance et l'épée échappaient à leur poing.

Challenged to make answer, the assassins of Italy and Hungary plead that they were but the sword, their captains were the hand. These are summoned in their turn, and cast their crimes in turn upon the judges who bade them shed blood and applauded their bloodshedding in the name of law and justice. And the judges and lawgivers are summoned in their stead :—

Ces hommes regardaient l'ange d'un air surpris :  
Comme, en lettres de feu, rayonnait sur sa face  
Son nom, Justice, entre eux ils disaient à voix basse :  
Que veut dire ce mot qu'il porte sur son front ?

Charged with their complicity in all the public crime and shame and horror of their period, these in turn cast the burden of their wrongdoing on the princes who commanded them and they obeyed, seeing how the priests and soothsayers had from all time assured them that kings were the images of God. The images of God are summoned, and appear, in the likeness of every form of evil imaginable by man :—

Devant chaque fantôme, en la brume glacée,  
Ayant le vague aspect d'une croix renversée,  
Venait un glaive nu, ferme et droit dans le vent,  
Qu'aucun bras ne tenait et qui semblait vivant.

Strange shapes of winged and monstrous beasts were harnessed to the chariots on which the thrones of the earth were borne forward. The figure seated on the last of them will be recognisable beyond all possibility of mistake by any reader whose eyes have ever rested on



a face which beyond most human faces bore the visible image and superscription of the soul behind it :—

Les trônes approchaient sous les lugubres cieus ;  
On entendait gémir autour des noirs essieux  
La clameur de tous ceux qu'avaient broyés leurs roues ;  
Ils venaient, ils fendaient l'ombre comme des proues ;  
Sous un souffle invisible ils semblaient se mouvoir ;  
Rien n'était plus étrange et plus farouche à voir  
Que ces chars effrayants tourbillonnant dans l'ombre.  
Dans le gouffre tranquille où l'humanité sombre,  
Ces trônes de la terre apparaissaient hideux.

Le dernier qui venait, horrible au milieu d'eux,  
Était à chaque marche encombré de squelettes  
Et de cadavres froids aux bouches violettes,  
Et le plancher rougi fumait, de sang baigné ;  
Le char qui le portait dans l'ombre était traîné  
Par un hibou tenant dans sa griffe une hache.  
Un être aux yeux de loup, homme par la moustache,  
Au sommet de ce char s'agitait étonné,  
Et se courbait furtif, livide et couronné.  
Pas un de ces Césars à l'allure guerrière  
Ne regardait cet homme. A l'écart, et derrière,  
Vêtu d'un noir manteau qui semblait un linceul,  
Espèce de lépreux du trône, il venait seul ;  
Il posait les deux mains sur sa face morose  
Comme pour empêcher qu'on y vît quelque chose ;  
Quand parfois il ôtait ses mains en se baissant,  
En lettres qui semblaient faites avec du sang  
On lisait sur son front ces trois mots :—Je le jure.

It is a fearful thing, said the Hebrew, to fall into the hands of the living God ; and it is a fearful thing for a malefactor to fall into the hands of an ever-living poet. The injured Cæsars of Rome—Tiberius, for example, and Domitian—have not even yet been delivered by the most conscientious efforts of German and Anglo-German Cæsarists out of the prison whose keys are kept by Juvenal ; and a greater than Juvenal is here.

Summoned to make answer to the charge of the angel of judgment, even these also have their resource for evasion, and cast all their crimes upon the Pope :—

Il nous disait : Je suis celui qui parle aux rois ;  
Quiconque me résiste et me brave est impie.  
Ce qu'ici-bas j'écris, là-haut Dieu le copie.  
L'église, mon épouse, éclore au mont Thabor,  
A fait de la doctrine une cage aux fils d'or,  
Et comme des oiseaux j'y tiens toutes les âmes.

This man had blessed the murderers in their triumph, and cursed their victims in the grave :—

Sa ceinture servait de corde à nos potences.  
Il liait de ses mains l'agneau sous nos sentences ;  
Et quand on nous criait : Grâce ! il nous criait : Feu !  
C'est à lui que le mal revient. Voilà, grand Dieu,  
Ce qu'il a fait : voilà ce qu'il nous a fait faire.  
Cet homme était le pôle et l'axe de la sphère ;  
Il est le responsable et nous le dénonçons !  
Seigneur, nous n'avons fait que suivre ses leçons,  
Seigneur, nous n'avons fait que suivre son exemple.

And the pontiff whose advent and whose promises had been hailed with such noble trust and acclaimed with such noble thankfulness by those who believed in him as a deliverer—by Landor among others, and by Hugo himself—the Caiaphas-Ischriot whose benediction had consecrated massacre and anointed perjury with the rancid oil of malodorous gladness above its fellows in empire and in crime—is summoned out of darkness to receive sentence by the sevenfold sounding of trumpets :—

Vêtu de lin plus blanc qu'un encensoir qui fume,  
Il avait, spectre blême aux idoles pareil,  
Les baisers de la foule empreints sur son orteil,  
Dans sa droite un bâton comme l'antique archonte,  
Sur son front la tiare, et dans ses yeux la honte.

De son cou descendait un long manteau doré,  
Et dans son poignet gauche il tenait, effaré,  
Comme un voleur surpris par celui qu'il dérobe,  
Des clefs qu'il essayait de cacher sous sa robe.  
Il était effrayant à force de terreur.

Quand surgit ce vieillard, on vit dans la lueur  
L'ombre et le mouvement de quelqu'un qui se penche.  
À l'apparition de cette robe blanche,  
Au plus noir de l'abîme un tonnerre gronda.

Then from all points of the immeasurable spaces,  
from the womb of the cloud and the edge of the pit,  
is witness given against Pope Pius IX. by the tyrants and  
the victims, mothers and children and old men, the  
judges and the judged, the murderers mingling with  
the murdered, great and small, obscure and famous :—

Tous ceux que j'avais vus passer dans les ténèbres,  
Avançant leur front triste, ouvrant leur œil terni,  
Fourmillement affreux qui peuplait l'infini,  
Tous ces spectres, vivant, parlant, riant naguère,  
Martyrs, bourreaux, et gens du peuple et gens de guerre,  
Regardant l'homme blanc d'épouvante ébloui,  
Élevèrent la main et crièrent : C'est lui.

Et pendant qu'ils criaient, sa robe devint rouge.

Au fond du gouffre où rien ne tressaille et ne bouge  
Un écho répéta :—C'est lui !—Les sombres rois  
Dirent :—C'est lui ! c'est lui ! c'est lui ! voilà sa croix !  
Les clefs du paradis sont dans ses mains fatales.—  
Et l'homme-loup, debout sur les cadavres pâles  
Dont le sang tiède encor tombait dans l'infini,  
Cria d'une voix rauque et sourde :—Il m'a béni !

A judgment less terrible than what follows is that  
by which Dante long ago made fast the gates of hell  
upon Nicholas and Boniface and Clement with one  
stroke of his inevitable hand. The ghastly agony of  
the condemned is given with all the bitterest realism  
of the great elder anti-papist who sent so many vicars

of Christ to everlasting torment for less offences than those of Mastai-Ferretti :—

Lui se tourna vers l'ange en frissonnant,  
 Et je vis le spectacle horrible et surprenant  
 D'un homme qui vieillit pendant qu'on le regarde.  
 L'agonie éteignit sa prunelle hagarde,  
 Sa bouche bégaya, son jarret se rompit,  
 Ses cheveux blanchissaient sur son front décrépit,  
 Ses tempes se ridaient comme si les années  
 S'étaient subitement sur sa face acharnées,  
 Ses yeux pleuraient, ses dents claquaient comme au gibet  
 Les genoux d'un squelette, et sa peau se plombait,  
 Et, stupide, il baissait, à chaque instant plus pâle,  
 Sa tête qu'écrasait la tiare papale.

From the sentence passed upon him after the avowal extorted by the angel of doom that he has none in the world above him but God alone on whom to cast the responsibility of his works, not a word may be taken away for the purpose of quotation, as not a word could have been added to it by Dante or by Ezekiel himself. But about the eternity of his damnation there is not, happily for the human conscience, any manner of doubt possible ; it must endure as long as the poem which proclaims it : in other words, as long as the immortality of poetry itself.

This great and terrible poem, the very crown or coping-stone of all the *Châtiments*, has a certain affinity with two others in which the poet's yearning after justice and mercy has borne his passionate imagination as high and far as here. In *Sultan Mourad* his immeasurable and incomparable depth of pity and charity seems well-nigh to have swallowed up all sense of necessary retribution : it is perhaps because the portentous array of crimes enumerated is remote in time and place from all experience of ours that conscience can allow the tenderness and sublimity of its inspiration

to justify the moral and ratify the sentence of the poem :—

Viens ! tu fus bon un jour, sois à jamais heureux.  
Entre, transfiguré ! tes crimes ténébreux,  
O roi, derrière toi s'effacent dans les gloires ;  
Tourne la tête, et vois blanchir tes ailes noires.

But in the crowning song of all the great three cycles every need and every instinct of the spirit may find the perfect exaltation of content. The vast and profound sense of ultimate and inevitable equity which animates every line of it is as firm and clear as the solid and massive splendour of its articulate expression. The date of it is outside and beyond the lapse of the centuries of time ; but the rule of the law of righteousness is there more evident and indisputable than ever during the flight of these. Hardly in the Hebrew prophecies is such distinct and vivid sublimity, as of actual and all but palpable vision, so thoroughly impregnated with moral and spiritual emotion. Not a verse of all that strike root into the memory for ever but is great alike by imagination and by faith. In such a single line as this—

Que qui n'entendit pas le remords l'entendrait—

there is the very note of conscience done into speech, cast into form, forged into substance

Avec de l'équité condensée en airain.

But this couplet, for immensity of imaginative range, is of one birth with the sublimest verses in the Book of Job :—

Et toute l'épouvante éparse au ciel est sœur  
De cet impénétrable et morne avertisseur.

From the magnificent overture to the second series, in which the poet has embodied in audible and visible

symbol the vision whence this book was conceived—a vision so far surpassing the perhaps unconsciously imitative inspiration of the Apocalypse, with its incurably lame and arduously prosaic efforts to reproduce the effect or mimic the majesty of earlier prophecies, that we are amazed if not scandalised to find that book actually bracketed in one sublime passage of this prelude with the greatest spiritual poem in the world, the *Oresteia* of Æschylus—the reader would infer that any student wishing to give a notion of the *Légende des Siècles* ought to have dwelt less than I have done upon a few of its innumerable beauties, and more than I have done upon the impression of its incomparable grandeur. But samples of pure sweetness and beauty are more easily and perhaps more profitably detached for quotation from their context than samples of a sublimity which can only be felt by full and appreciative study of an entire and perfect poem. And it is rather from the prelude itself than from any possible commentary on it that a thoughtful and careful reader will seek to gather the aim and meaning of the book. It is there likened to a vast disjointed ruin lit by gleams of light—‘le reste effrayant de Babel’—a palace and a charnel in one, built by doom for death to dwell in:—

Où se posent pourtant parfois, quand elles l'osent,  
De la façon dont l'aile et le rayon se posent,  
La liberté, lumière, et l'espérance, oiseau.

But over and within this book—

traduit

Du passé, du tombeau, du gouffre et de la nuit—

faith shines as a kindling torch, hope breathes as a quickening wind, love burns as a cleansing fire. It is tragic, not with the hopeless tragedy of Dante or the

all but hopeless tragedy of Shakespeare. Whether we can or cannot share the infinite hope and inviolable faith to which the whole active and suffering life of the poet has borne such unbroken and imperishable witness, we cannot in any case but recognise the greatness and heroism of his love for mankind. As in the case of Æschylus it is the hunger and thirst after righteousness, the deep desire for perfect justice in heaven as on earth, which would seem to assure the prophet's inmost heart of its final triumph by the prevalence of wisdom and of light over all claims and all pleas established or asserted by the children of darkness, so in the case of Victor Hugo is it the hunger and thirst after reconciliation, the love of loving-kindness, the master passion of mercy, which persists in hope and insists on faith, even in face of the hardest and darkest experience through which a nation or a man can pass. When evil was most triumphant throughout Europe, he put forth in a single book of verse, published with strange difficulty against incredible impediments, such a protest as would entitle him to say, in the very words he has given to the Olympian of old—

Quand, dans le saint pæan par les mondes chanté,  
L'harmonie amoindrie avorte ou dégénère,  
Je rends le rythme aux cieux par un coup de tonnerre :

and now more than ever would the verses that follow befit the lips of their author, if speaking in his own person :—

Mon crâne plein d'échos, plein de lueurs, plein d'yeux,  
Est l'autre éblouissant du grand Pan radieux ;  
En me voyant on croit entendre le murmure  
De la ville habitée et de la moisson mûre,  
Le bruit du gouffre au chant de l'azur réuni,  
L'onde sur l'océan, le vent dans l'infini,  
Et le frémissement des deux ailes du cygne.

It is held unseemly to speak of the living as we speak of the dead ; when Victor Hugo has joined the company of his equals, but apparently not till then, it will seem strange to regard the giver of all the gifts we have received from him with less than love that deepens into worship, than worship that brightens into love. Meantime it is only in the phrase of one of his own kindred, poet and exile and prophet of a darker age than his, that the last word should here be spoken of the man by whose name our century will be known for ever to all ages and nations that keep any record or memory of what was highest and most memorable in the spiritual history of the past :—

Onorate l' altissimo poeta.



## A STUDY OF 'LES MISÉRABLES,' PART I

1862

THE new novel, with which Victor Hugo is now occupying the world of letters in Paris, is a remarkable attempt to examine social problems from the artistic point of view. It has some features which are very open to criticism. The mere idea of presenting a picture of human life, in its greatness and in its weakness, through ten volumes of an encyclopædic romance, seems to argue a curious confusion of scientific and artistic possibilities ; the student of Shakespeare ought, one would think, to have known better that the depths of the heart are searchless. Again, that strange love of the supernatural and the grotesque which inspired the painter of Habibrah and Bug-Jargal, of Quasimodo and the Archdeacon, reappears in the present volumes, where the *dramatis personæ* are a patriarchal bishop, a saintly burglar, a narrow-natured inspector of police, and a self-sacrificing Magdalene. Revolt against society and systems is the principle proclaimed in the preface, and taught in every incident of the story. Yet withal Victor Hugo is no vulgar rebel against authority ; no mere blaspheming Capaneus ; but a Titan stealing light that he may impart it. Age has mellowed without impairing his inspiration, and an unquenchable faith in the good of human nature has finally triumphed over the fervid political animosities of the man who began life as a Legitimist and is now in exile as a Republican. It need scarcely be said that his style has

a nameless charm of language, or that his story always interests, though it may fail to convince. To those who can allow themselves to forget that M. Victor Hugo's system of the world is not ours, and that he has another heaven and another earth, the exquisite finish of every detail, the nature thrown into every little touch, will give, partially, at least, the effects of actual and very beautiful life. It is like music and familiar voices that have blended with the fantastic tracery of a dream.

*Fantini*, as the first part of *Les Misérables* is called, consists of a series of episodes completing one another, rather than of a connected narrative. The first is a beautiful sketch of Monseigneur Myriel, Bishop of D——, a gentleman who has taken orders late in life, having been ruined by the Revolution, and in whom the devotion of the saint is tempered by the tact of the man of the world. His first act, when he arrives at his see, is to turn his palace into a hospital, and he reserved for himself only forty pounds a year out of his revenues for his own support. His liberality and courage make him the idol of his people, and he is equally in his place escorting a criminal to the scaffold or arguing with a Voltairian senator. When his opponent tells him that 'God does very well for the people,' who 'butter their dry bread with legends, chimeras, the immortality of the soul, and Paradise,' the bishop, instead of losing his temper, only clasps his hands. 'This is something like talking. But what a grand and truly wonderful thing this materialism is! He who once has it has his eyes opened; he will not be so stupid as to expose himself to be banished like Cato, or stoned like Stephen, or burned like Joan of Arc. But you philosophers are easy sovereigns, and you will let the poor believe in God instead of in

philosophy, just as they have a goose and chestnuts for Christmas instead of a truffled turkey.’ Sometimes, it is true, Monseigneur Myriel meets with a more formidable disputant ; once in performance of a painful duty he goes to visit a dying member of the Convention who has only not voted the King’s death. But the philosopher has a faith of his own, and pushes his spiritual superior hard. ‘ To me,’ he observes, when the bishop speaks of the crimes of the Revolution, ‘ the brother of Cartouche, an innocent boy, hung up under the arms till he died for the mere crime of being Cartouche’s brother, is as bad a thought as the grandson of Louis xv., an innocent child, martyred in the Temple Tower for the mere crime of having been the grandson of Louis xv.’ ‘ Sir,’ said the bishop, ‘ I do not like to hear these names coupled—“ Cartouche,” “ Louis xv.” Whose advocate are you ? ’ It ends by the Catholic prelate receiving the dying Jacobin’s benediction. But although he has learned to appreciate the difference, the bishop’s faith in his old creed is unshaken ; he does not care to examine the mysteries he believes ; and ‘ he treasures in his soul a serious reverence for the twilight.’

In fact, his life is engrossed with other cares than speculation ; and his simple, genial nature turns from business and study to work in his garden, or to the society of his sister and housekeeper, two old ladies who have grown into Monseigneur’s habits, without the ability fully to understand his nature. The housekeeper especially grumbles at her master’s orders that the Palace door be always left on the latch, in order that visitors may have access to him. The custom, in truth, has its inconveniences. One evening the door is opened by a ticket-of-leave convict, who is on his way to the town assigned him by the police as a

residence. Jean Valjean was originally condemned to the hulks for stealing in order to save his sister's family from starvation, but his term of five years has been lengthened to nineteen in consequence of his repeated attempts to escape. Now that he is set at liberty he is a moody, desperate man, at war with society, which has imprisoned him, and which treats him as an outcast. He has not even been able to get lodging in any inn of the bishop's town, and is directed by a lady, who does not know his antecedents, to the Palace. The bishop at once makes him sit down to dinner, talks with him like a friend, and assigns him a bedroom near his own.

Next morning it appears that Jean Valjean and the bishop's plate are missing, and the police presently bring him in, having arrested him on suspicion. The bishop declares that the plate was a present, and dismisses the convict with an admonition to employ the proceeds of it in becoming an honest man. But the passage to good is not so easy. Jean Valjean, in his day's march, meets a little Savoyard, who is tossing his money in the air, and a piece of two francs falls at Jean's feet. He takes it and drives the boy away. Then, when it is too late, the consciousness of his baseness overpowers him, the more vividly, perhaps, because this last offence has been against one of the poor, and he rushes back to the bishop's palace to consult with his benefactor. Thenceforward all trace of him disappears, though the police are after him.

The next scene is of a very different kind. Three students have promised their mistresses a surprise, and take them to dine in a restaurant near Paris. After dinner they leave the room, and it presently appears that the surprise planned has been the young men's return to their homes in the south, and the abandon-

ment of the women they have been living with. ‘ The country demands,’ says their parting letter, ‘ that we turn out prefects, fathers of families, and counsellors of state like other people. Venerate us, we are sacrificing ourselves. Shed some hasty tears for us, and replace us without delay.’ The counsel is speedily followed by two of the desolate Ariadnes, but the third, Fantine, has not yet been depraved, and has a little daughter to live for. Renouncing the ineffectual struggle to earn her bread honestly in Paris, she commits her child to the care of a family at Montfermeil, and goes herself to M.-sur-M., where she finds employment in the manufactories of a M. Madeleine. M. Madeleine, we may say at once, is the reformed Jean Valjean, now a man of substance and cultivation, and an intelligent philanthropist, who has refused the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and only consented to become mayor that his opportunities of doing good may be enlarged.

Unhappily, the female operatives under him are superintended by a woman less large-natured than himself, who, having ascertained Fantine’s antecedents, dismisses her at a time when she is in debt, and the unworthy guardians of her child clamorous for money. Fantine naturally sinks to the lowest depths ; and, having sold her hair, and even her front teeth, to procure money for her child, becomes a street outcast. In this capacity she is taken up by the police for disorderly conduct, and is only saved from prison and sent to the hospital by M. Madeleine’s intervention. But this interference of the mayor irritates the Inspector Javert, a methodical man, in whom the spirit of his duties has become intellect and conscience, and who, having long suspected M. Madeleine’s antecedents, now denounces him at headquarters.

Unexpectedly the accusation is not even listened to. It appears that a man has already been taken up who is believed to be the ex-convict Jean Valjean, and Javert himself is confounded and convinced by the strong resemblance. It thus becomes M. Madeleine's duty to denounce himself, and after a terrible inner conflict he accomplishes it. Before measures can be taken for his arrest he has just time to see Fantine die. She is buried in 'what is called the public ditch' of the cemetery where the poor lie confusedly. 'Happily God knows how to recover the soul.' Jean Valjean, again convict in the eyes of the law, as his robbery of the little Savoyard is inscribed in the books of the police, escapes, chiefly through the devotion of a heroic Sister of Charity—the work of his last ten years ruined—to begin the world again.

It is difficult to criticise an unfinished work where the next few volumes may correct all that we find one-sided and imperfect in the first two, but the question to what purpose is this picture of human misery and shortcomings remains to our mind the great argument against M. Victor Hugo's book. He himself says that it is one of a class which can never fail to have a use 'so long as there shall exist through laws and manners a social damnation creating artificial hells in the midst of civilisation, and complicating destiny which is divine, with a human fatality.' No doubt much of this is true. Our imperfections do often reproduce themselves in a ghastly progeny of crime, with which we seem to be unconnected, and which only God can father on its true parents. The philanthropy that teaches us to educate that we may not have to correct, and to make reform the great object of punishment, can never be out of place. But surely it is false to infer that laws and manners do in any eminent degree create a social

damnation. Allowing that Jean Valjean was punished beyond his due, and so brutalised by punishment, we may yet fairly say that the era of Draconian legislation is past, and that, after all, we must in this world look chiefly to acts, and I leave the question of intention to heaven. The true preventive for all crimes that arise from necessity is the simple expedient of an efficient poor law, which M. Victor Hugo, like most Frenchmen not men of science, would probably regard with horror. For the man who, having the workhouse at hand, prefers stealing to breaking stones and a temporary separation from his family, we confess we have little pity.

The case of Fantine's ruin and desertion is no doubt more difficult. The problem how to keep a young girl, who can earn a scanty but sufficient living by her needle, from preferring to live idly, expensively, and at the cost of her self-respect, with a young man whose dress and manners fascinate her, because they seem to indicate superiority, is one which no legislation can solve. But M. Victor Hugo is untrue to morality and to art when he entitles the latter period of Fantine's career *The Descent*. He seems to imply that if her seducer had pensioned her, and she had been able to live on without selling herself, taking her old sin as matter of pleasant memory, she would have been a higher woman than she was as the street pariah. To ourselves, Fantine, mutilating herself, sacrificing life and shame for her daughter, is on a higher moral level than Fantine dining happily at St. Cloud with her seducer and his friends. Nor can we see that matters would be much mended if the inequalities of social life could by any miracle be so far levelled that a woman's love of refinement and indolence should no longer be inducements to her to prefer concubinage to marriage.

Without reference to the fact that great disparity in the number of the sexes seems to lead under any circumstance to illicit connections, or to the argument that inequalities must always remain, and that a woman may as well sell herself for refinement or even for money as for physical beauty, we object absolutely to the idea that we can extirpate vice by removing its opportunities. We want the morality of men, not the faultless movements of puppets, and the feeble innocence of the boy unacquainted with evil or unattracted by it is of less value than the firm will that has learned in much suffering to be its own law.

It is strange that an artist like M. Victor Hugo should believe that there is any fatality in men's manners which can overbear a resolute conception of morality. Prometheus never falters from his purpose, though the vulture gnaws his liver, and the earth is heaving around him. Is it reserved for our own century to proclaim that man, who seems to have conquered space, is yet powerless against his own appetites, and must bind himself that he may not rush upon the sword? If so, '*Christus nos liberavit*,' the text M. Victor Hugo mournfully quotes, has indeed lost its meaning, or has brought death into the world.



## A STUDY OF 'LES MISÉRABLES,' PARTS II AND III

1862

It is something of a juggler's trick to squeeze into reviewing shape all one has to say of a great book. Two fresh acts of the great prose play of Victor Hugo hold too much matter in them to be sifted, tasted, pronounced on in a breath. At most one can just attempt to touch on this or that outside detail of it. The temple is building before our eyes, and till the master builder takes down his scaffolding we can hardly say for certain how the parts fit.

We may let the social side of the question stand over for the present. Any book above a certain pitch of writing must be taken first of all to be a work of pure art. For we can bring no man's work to a higher standard. All the excellence of moral purpose in the world will never serve for salt to a thing born rotten. Especially in handling any work of the greatest master we have alive we must keep to the real test. No philanthropics or philosophies that may get between an artist and his work can be permitted to shove by the main question.

As to the working power of Victor Hugo, no man will doubt, but we have it here in pure and fresh force. That old miraculous style of his, that perfection of touch, all the sweetness and all the strength of it, are now as they were before. So, too, with the dramatic side of his books ; as long as he writes at all he must write like the one supremely great modern dramatist.

Principles and theories, the very things of all others surest to ruin and deform the working faculty of meaner men, give way when it comes to practice before the grand just instinct that was born with him. As to his personal and moral tastes, they are keen and decisive enough ; but as a poet bound to handle character simply as his raw material, and bring to all questions of good or evil the impartiality of a crucible, he can poise Ratbert with Evriadnus, Ruy Blas with Gubetta, Thénardiers with Myriels, and refrain from the judgment. Even against his own will, all the heat of his hatred of evil, all his pure, fierce wrath and disgust at it, cannot burn out the natural stamp. He must give a man his fair share, and be content to mix beautiful things with foul and terrible. It is the supreme test of a great dramatist, that he can be fair to his villains. A little one takes either to bespattering them or to cockering them.

And this book of *Les Misérables*, wide and deep as it strikes and shoots with root and branch, is at heart a play before all things. We are far enough now into the body of it to see somewhat of its make. The second and third acts have spaces here and there for some interlude, lyrical rests in the press of the action. Here is nothing like the poignant and bitter beauty of those latter chapters about Fantine ; no single detail that catches and stings in the reading like some of those touches where the man's terrible tenderness comes out. No song either, to set against that marvellous one in the first part—such a song as we shall never get from any master but one ; nor any one bit of effect so subtle and of such wonderful imaginative justice as the dream of Jean Valjean. But infinite breadth and weight of work there is ; incomparable variety of power and cunning. For the matter of social history

we get a whole period, containing the fag-end of the Restoration and the first working days of the July Government, here dug up and laid out. The last quaint shapes of legitimacy while still feverishly and faintly alive ; the first green fruit and soft blossom of opinions that were to come under the harvest sickles in 1848 ; we get sight of each lying used up and done with, miles and years away from us. One singular thing in especial we have a chance here of looking at, and, if we please, of undertaking ; that ‘ recrudescence ’ of the revolution which began to work and get vent, it seems, almost before the House of Orleans was warm in its new honours. It is worth trying to appreciate that curious eager temper of mind which had fallen on a whole generation, even while the mould of the first Empire was hardly yet broken ; something of a sensual passionate devotion set to work in the service of political beliefs. But as a piece of exquisite work we had rather look to the study of the *grande bourgeoisie*. Here the humour is pure and the aim simple ; whereas in all that concerns Enjolras and his company, some sense of personal sentiment and political meaning will slip in at every loophole. All this no doubt improves the book in one sense ; gives it heat, directness, sharp clear life, and actual breath ; but it is always on the edge of interference with the proper business of so great a book.

The high comedy of M. Gillenormand is as noble in manner as Molière’s work ; the deep-rooted, loud-tongued beliefs of the *bourgeoisie*, this clear sense of actual things, philosophic humours and charities, intolerant genialities, the old flavour of Voltaire in him salted with some rancid pinch of De Maistre royalism, all the essence of him and all the accidents of his surrounding, are given in the subtle way of great writers,

who can never slur or smear even in their broadest rapid work. As perfect in her slight way is Mlle. Gillenormand, with pins and buckles stuck in to hide what no eye ever turned towards ; who could have given an Englishwoman three points in the game of prudery, and then have beaten her out of sight ; not to be looked back at by any mortal. ' *Nulli hominum respectabilis*, and yet so respectable ! ' says Ernest Clouet, in his *Études Anglaises*.

We may remark, too, slipped in softly between the fiery Waterloo chapters and the grave, gentle studies of convent life and work, those sketches of children's ways which no one else has ever made so perfect. After all that riot of sound and colour, fierce, earnest heat of labour, and keen endeavour to judge and to explain the reason or the result of huge reverse and change ; with that word of Cambronne's (a word of not less noble daring as repeated by a historian than as uttered by a soldier), hot in our hearing still, as it was thrown out in the teeth of the enemy ; we get instead such an admirable bit of invention and reasoning as Eponine's discourse on the kitten (*Vois-tu, ma sœur, jouons avec. Je serais une dame*, and so forth). Even Mamillius in Shakespeare is hardly so perfect a child as some of Hugo's. Both masters have something of the same passion for them, and the same delight in taking their talk and thought to pieces ; but in corners of Hugo's work one comes upon some stray of child's furniture such as Blake himself might have left or lost somewhere.

Of the outside story, and the way in which every scene of our play is got up and put together, we have said nothing yet ; and can in effect say nothing, except that the workmanship here is the same as it always was ; the effect as true, the interest as deep and sharp as ever.

But on the system of speculative explanation started in the sixth volume a word or two of comment may be ventured here.

The sickly and venomous side of a society is dissected and defined ; specimens of this disease and that classed and labelled ; dim, hateful outlines of thievish and murderous faces set down one by one. Then the social question is brought up and faced ; and the belief clearly and sharply declared that all this may be healed or done away with by simple increase of light, knowledge, and a fair system of work and life. No man doubts but that the gain of fresh light and purer knowledge must serve to cure or to cut off much of this social sickness ; that some kinds of evil once brought into clear light must be at once burnt up, the daylight being to them as fire ; that physical evils, for instance, may be met and weeded out by material remedy. Reform, in some simple sense, is a condition of all life ; this minute’s breath is not the same as last minute’s ; no shape of things is immutable absolutely ; as far as reason or faith or sense can lay hold on it, it must change and get new forms to live by. If evil is in effect a skin disease in a man or in a social body, doubtless by perfection of moral surgery it may be cut, purged, and burned out of the world in time. But it is hard to conceive that the greatest intellects and the minds most trained and broken into noble and subtle labour of thought can actually hold on to this dogma. Yet if society be perfectible, there is no other way ; for if evil is to live at all it will grow and cohere to a certainty, struggle and settle into some place it may thrive in, and push out shoots into some warm, foul air of prosperity. Besides, if the thing were possible, would it be a thing to wish for ? To live in a world with the evil drained off would be a heavy and hopeless

kind of life. All this theorising about reform turns on hinges, and men turn by other machinery. About the deepest and wisest thing said these many years on the matter is that in *Sordello*, where all philosophies of reform and renewal are sifted and shaken and turned over in a hand as strong as Victor Hugo's own. We can only tear out some few verses by way of explaining ; but throughout that sixth book of our greatest modern English poem, the close chain of thoughts, welded one within another, and forged even to red heat in the fire of a supreme dramatic eloquence, supports and includes all that can well be said or thought on these deep, dim questions. The citation has a hard abrupt sound, taken thus out of its place, but even as they stand stripped of setting, no other man could put his meaning in such words :—

Oh, flame persists, but is not glare as stanch ?  
Where the salt marshes stagnate ; crystals branch—  
Blood dries to crimson—Evil's beautified  
In every shape ! But Beauty thrust aside  
You banish Evil ; wherefore ? After all  
Is Evil our result less natural  
Than Good ?

All this, of course, in no wise affects the material side of the business ; the question here started neither helps nor hinders the social labourer. We are at issue with the letter of the book on the ground of moral speculation only. There we object to the appearance even of such a rough, trenchant solution of the difficulty as the text seems to offer. All minor objections and distastes we might put forward, not without all fit reverence and reluctance, may be said to adhere to or to grow out of this great one. It has been fairly set down, and must stand for what it is worth ; for here it cannot be followed up and reasoned out.

A STUDY OF  
'LES MISÉRABLES,' PART IV

1862

OF this fourth part there must be things enough to say, if one had space or wit to arrange them in some methodical, intelligible form ; a labour requiring time to think out one's own conclusions. Doubt and delight will have to contend for the upper hand in the minds of most men who have set to studying it thoroughly. The pleasure taken in the beauty of it, the strength and sweetness of the matter, the grace and skill of the manner, is a sufficiently simple thing by itself. But a just and adequate revision of the two volumes, and all they imply or involve, is no light aim to have before one. Some hints we may set down, but in a tattered fragmentary shape, rather as questions raised than as convictions worked out ; always, and above all, with a reasonable and just humility, and reserving the admission that the author is likelier to see and do what is right for him than any commentator to set him straight. So that whatever may be said or suggested in nowise affects our fullest recognition of Victor Hugo as the chief master left over us.

One questionable point there seems to us to be in the composition and working order of his great various intellect ; the sense of humour is not mixed up with the other senses of it, does not permeate and leave a colour and a taste behind in all parts of the mind, as it does in Shakespeare or Molière. With those two, the wise and beautiful humour that is in

them runs through all the veins and nerves of their intellect ; they mix well ; the serious passionate sides of them are sensibly affected by the humorous side ; they never overstep or slip aside from the absolutely just and right. Humour is a sort of conscience—a substitute for one, rather—working in matters of art, as conscience should do in a matter of morals. A man with a perfect sense of humour cannot run to rant or relax into sentiment. Humour well mixed into a man's work gives balance, and implies the power of abstinence and choice. Now in much of Hugo's work it is not well mixed in. Like all supremely great poets, he has abundance of it ; infinite, vigorous, various humour, supple and flexible, keen and deep and delicate ; but it lies apart, well away from the rest of him, in a distinct layer, so to speak, of its own ; does not in any way act upon his beliefs, passions, opinions.

If he had written the *École des Femmes* he would have lifted Arnolphe fairly out of his absurdities, washed and picked him clean of all ludicrous flaws and specks, and left the passion hidden at the root of his dotage pathetic and pure ; he would not have had the heart, like Molière, to make such a laughably piteous figure of him ; to keep so grotesque a dolorous mask well riveted on the features convulsed by an agony that was also Molière's own ; to pitch in such an absurd false key the notes of a voice broken upon by that sense of sorrow and shame familiar to the husband of Armande Bejart. In his *Pochades et Paradoxes*, Félicien Cossu has remarked acutely enough on this difference, which he accepts as the generic point of difference between two styles and two centuries. ' Que la fatalité frappe sur les Molière,' the critic says, in his sharp, affected way, ' on n'entendra point les pleurs, mais on verra le sang ; que la fatalité frappe sur un homme de nos



jours, et qu'elle lui fasse même la plus mince entaille, cela gémit, pleurera, maudira, hurlera, demeurera à faire hausser les épaules à l'infini. Il n'y a plus de cocus depuis que le réalisme commence à s'apitoyer sur les mains.'

However that may be—and some grain of truth and sense does seem to lie under the offensive foolish style of the poetic journalist—this sharp line of separation between the serious and humorous is the main point of unlikeness between the workmanship of Victor Hugo and the workmanship of Shakespeare. Polonius, Osric even, affect Hamlet more or less ; Don César hardly touches on Ruy Blas. To borrow again an untranslatable phrase from Cossu's article, 'Tholomyès glisse sur Jean Valjean.' The boundary lines of each man's character stand hard and clear and cleanly cut ; Molière would have mixed them finely and softly, letting one overflow into another. This may be merely saying that the greatness of one man is not the greatness of another man. In all that Hugo writes the lyrical faculty beats so strongly and burns with such a vivid heat and light, that it must naturally at times get the mastery over all others. His argument sums itself up in a poem or a psalm ; such as that magnificent one, vibrating with passionate light and sound, which finishes off the sharp eager discords of the *Châtiments* with such a wonderful and lordly music ; a psalm as vehement in faith and earnestness as any Hebrew one, and written with the same deep confident impulse. This infusion of the intensest unmixed lyrical passion into things political is, of course, an offence and an irritation to the analytic intellect, which is much given to arrogate to itself the right of solution for all practical matters. And indeed we may reasonably grudge the time and labour—still more the faith and hope and

fervent vigour of mind—lavished on social subjects, and all kinds of actual wrongs and remedies ; such of us at least as regard a good work of art as the first of all good deeds for an artist, and would consider a fresh Hamlet or a new Ruy Blas cheaply purchased by the hanging without trial of a dozen innocent men. All this of the abolition of punishment, extension of moral influence, government by love and light, extinction of war, fusion of boundaries, ‘ quenching of hell itself with the tears of reconciled humanity ’ (as the satirical Cossu expresses it), disappearance of evil and inauguration of all the public virtues, does begin to fall rather flat on our ears. Improve people beyond a certain point and they become an affliction to the unimprovable part of men.

And yet, however we may grudge the best man of us to philanthropy and social schemes, no one has a right to undervalue for an instant the beauty and worth of such work, much less the glorious qualities which go to the making up of such a workman ; the unspeakable tenderness and the infinite power in him, the pure, noble pity and love for all men that sets him at work, the perfect hatred and horror of wrong, the inexhaustible, deep compassion that would find help for all who suffer, the heroic charity that passes by none of all the oppressed in the world. It is dull work to begin snarling and nibbling at the heels of a great theory or a grand fanaticism even. Besides, a man has a right to speak as he will always, but most of all when he speaks out of the prison-house of an exile accepted and endured of his own free will as on the whole more tolerable than any tacit submission to facts, when the facts happen to be unjust and to include disgrace and oppression and treason as component parts of them. Banishment, persecution of any sort, raises one man in

the same ratio as success and prosperity depress another. From such an one we must accept, with a certain reverence and deference, all statements or speculations he may set abroad connected with the subject matter of his exile. His opinions have a stamp on them ; any injustice done here is something worse than an error of judgment ; any derision thrown that way recoils with dishonour upon the thrower of it. Those who have suffered for the sake of no cause and no faith of theirs owe at least a salute in passing to opinions for which any man has made up his mind to bear and to resist civil.

This is all we have to say here of the social business, which could not well be passed over without some mark of attention. Coming now to details of art, our commentary must more than ever seem weak, inadequate, narrow—the flaccid scrawl of some boy’s pencil on the margins. As to the style, for instance, we may observe simply that the English translator, if he have any capacity or conscience, will find some tough pieces of work cut out for him. To render fitly and comprehensively such passages as the description of the garden in the Rue Plumet will take some time and care. This style of Victor Hugo’s is not easy to catch and reproduce effectively. To find fault with it, lay a finger on the flaws and knots of it, set a mark against this or that phrase—even to seize on some salient point and hold it up in the way of parody—these are the easy things to do. It has singular alternations of fluent power and sharp condensed angular thought ; moves now softly and freely, now with a sort of abrupt military step, a tight-laced, short-breathed kind of march, as it were ; a style broken and split up into bright, hard fragments of spar, that have a painful sparkle in them, and rough, jagged notches

A STUDY OF  
'LES MISÉRABLES,' PART V

1862

RESTING now for good on the last step of the stair, and looking back upon the five vast stages or stories traversed, one has less hope than ever of being able to give a fair conjectural measurement of the whole. In point of size and matter we know no book like this. Some, indeed, loose-hung in the joints, impotent, inert masses of dead timber-work harnessed to various ingenious kinds of machinery and impelled by steam or galvinism, have scrambled and stumbled over a greater space of written paper, and fallen at the end (say) of some fortieth volume with a heavy sprawl ; but we take no account here of the largest bulk that has no life in it. Some, again, have flowed with a simple, single impulse as of running water through longer reaches of land ; complete and admirable works in their way, but lower down in the stages of life. This present book, like all serious books of a great man, has in it the highest form of vitality that can be given to written words. To continue our small parable, we may say that some books have the life of birds in them, some of beasts, some of reptiles even, some merely of flowers or fruits ; some also of simple earth or water, fire or vapour ; each with some excellence of its own in its own place. But the loftiest form of life and the noblest kind of excellence a book can attain to is to recall, by the analogy we have adopted, the place and likeness of a man in this ascending scale of life. Such

a place, it seems to us, we must assign to this book. It has not (if we may take leave to bend and strain the metaphor a little further) the perfection of a flower nor the faculty of a bird or beast. It has the form, the faults, the qualities, and general build of a man. It has not the wings or the eyes or the talons, the shapelessness or speed or sweetness, that belong by right of birth to lower classes and kinds. Some books may be sharper-sighted, some may be more complete and faultless, some may have some attraction of colour and savour. This one has in it the breath of human life and the form of human work ; it is of a high and rare kind, not to be had for the asking.

In an article dated as far back as September, 1847, included nine years later in the brilliant little magazine of incisive articles called *Profils et Grimaces*, M. Auguste Vacquerie—whose name here cited should carry some weight with it, he being ‘ a pupil in poetry of the greatest poet since Shakespeare, and a companion in banishment of the greatest exile since Dante ’ at least, being such in the eyes of our friend of the *Écho Républicain*—has given us a record of his first meeting with this book, then already born some years since, and tolerably well grown, it appears, although not to be thrown out to those on the wrong side of the author’s privacy for many years yet.

This man-child of M. Hugo’s is, it should seem, older than many men of the generation it has fallen among ; has more years, perhaps, behind it than some even of its critics. All these years the great poem has spent in the crib and swaddling-clothes of manuscript, defrauded of light, grudged its share of work, cheated of its real proper childhood. Many must have died in the interim between its actual birth and its entry on a fair general stage who would have been thankful

enough for it ; many whom it would have profited and served in all ways. Even in 1847 its first and best critic was crying out to have it made public at once. In the wording of that appeal, he has well and delicately defined certain of its chief qualities ; the strength of shadow and the sweetness of light in it, its pitiless tenderness, the depth and width of it, the great real life and heat shed all through it, the vast forms and perfect circulation of its limbs. If it were but once well out, he said, one might then try to give way and vent to the oppressive admiration for it. At least we have it here, clothed in tangible print and sewn up in its ten volumes ; and how it may be with others we cannot say, but we find it no such easy thing to get play for the expression of the effects of it. We must even set ourselves again to the piecemeal labours of analysis and commentary ; we can but, in the words of another reviewer, ' *éplucher, vanner, émietter, émorfler ce grand livre ; et cependant* ' (adds he with some justice), ' *ce que nous ne citons pas, comme qui dirait le rebut, le morfil, le bran du son, ne vaut guère moins que ce que nous citons, c'est-à-dire que le bon grain, que la lame vierge, que le métal pur. Donc épluchons au hasard.* ' A passage not over coherent or consistent in metaphor, but in meaning well enough.

Taken simply as a work of art, and handled for the present from the outside only, two minor sections of the book may be supposed to resume, in a sort of type as it were, the two great sides of it—the double aim and double power of the book. In the seventh volume there is what we may call the dissection of a garden ; in the ninth, we have the same anatomical process applied to the great sewer of Paris. In the chapter headed (after the author's fashion, when the appetite for idyllic description gets hold of him) ' *Foliis ac*

Frondebis,’ he has used up, in making a framework for the loves of Cosette and Marius, all shapes of sound, all shades of colour, and all scales of perfume which go to make up spring. These scenes of the Rue Plumet have more in them of the musical passion of language, the heat and rapidity by which one sees that prose is gaining fast on poetry, than any other division of the book. There the writer has gathered in and set down legibly all the most fine and subtle effects of beauty reducible into speech. For this sort of work there is no such poet as Hugo ; in this clear, keen, intricate element he draws breath more freely, and strikes out more strongly than any other.

Especially in his latest poems one may notice that this power and passion of his has grown up and gathered strength with the growth of his other powers. Such a supreme faculty of mere painting, filled and warmed throughout by such a strength of human thought and moral feeling, never before got expression in verse. Let any one who would appreciate this way of work begin studying such specimens of it as the sixth, ninth, sixteenth, and seventeenth poems of the last book of the *Contemplations* ; he must also take into account the innumerable slighter instances scattered broadly through the poet’s whole field of work. All that has ever been written (for example) on mountain landscape and effects of starry nights seems thin, dim, lank, insufficient, incompetent, by the side of one passage in *Le Régiment du baron Madruce* ; take only this shred torn away from the context, where Hugo speaks of the passes of the hills being hewn into ‘ the sharp shape of citadels ’ :—

Ayant reçu de Dieu des Créneaux où, le soir,  
L’homme peut, d’embrasure en embrasure, voir  
Étinceler le fer de lance des étoiles.

Take also a fellow-picture of the sea under the same light and shadow ; did ever anything written on it come up to the mark of this ?

Les étoiles, points d'or, percent les branches noires ;  
Le flot huileux et lourd décompose ses moires  
Sur l'océan blêmi ;  
Les nuages ont l'air d'oiseaux prenant la fuite ;  
Par moments le vent parle, et dit des mots sans suite,  
Comme un homme endormi.

By the side of any such picture this one description which we started from, of the garden in the Rue Plumet, may fairly take stand. To analyse it we must have leave to borrow once and again from the long and laborious review, somewhat roughly and loosely worded as it is, to which reference has before been made ; the writer of that notice having at least the merits of careful study and fearless expression, and it being especially difficult to give in a purely English commentary any just idea of a style of work so wholly French in its supple power and beauty.

In this chapter of the garden the mere words have caught up (so to speak) and given back some sense of the vast, vigorous growth and death of things, of all those physical glories, all that mystical side of sensuous nature, handled so grandly in the great Pagan-renaissance poem of the *Petites Épopées*. At every step or stroke which opens up or cuts out some new point of insight, we know again the strong and cunning handiwork of the man who wrote *Le Satyre*. There is a whole season, the body and soul of it, 'done into print' ; the soft or sharp sound of wind, the smell of sap, 'the hunger before the conception of spring, and the travail before the birth of summer, endless desire translating itself into endless production, the surplus of pain poured out to compound the excess of pleasure,' what-



ever that may be, ‘ a power and quality reminding him,’ the author of *Les Amours Étiques*, ‘ of those words of an American poet,’ happily unknown to us, but quoted by the reviewer in legible if questionable English, ‘ who has sung, in a cadence luminous and vibrating, “ the lusts of the leaves, the famine of the flowers, the appetite of the youth of the year ” ; all the tremulous odour and rumour of a season filled to the lips with luxury and life ; justice done to every bird and blade and insect that has to complete spring.’ Reserving our opinion of those writing formulas peculiar to MM. Cossu and Clouet (or Clouët, is it ?) and their school, we may allow this ; that ‘ there never was such a rush and overflow (*élanement et débordement*) of dumb natural beauty into human language.’ In the second book of the fifth part it appears to M. Cossu that ‘ we get the wrong side of this curious great gift. One feels,’ that is, those endowed with the nerves and the perceptions of the writer feel, ‘ in the throat and nostrils and hair that horrible pungent poison ’ ; much as the actual thing might make one ‘ sicken and sneeze and shudder all in a breath.’ Charity would recommend, would even implore, M. Cossu to abstain from the reperusal of this part of the book.

We here part company with this (in every way) too susceptible critic, and must at length turn to that side of our present business from which we have held off so long. The same thing is true of this as of all great tragic plays ; that while any number of remarks, good or bad, pertinent or impertinent, may be thrown out on the first four acts, the fifth, if it does its work well, must always remain outside of all comment. We had rather frankly resolve and admit that this last part cannot well be taken to pieces ; ‘ there went more to the putting of it together.’ The pathetic passionate

beauty of all these last chapters is past remarking on. The moral and mental greatness of Hugo's work never came out clearer. He has always had a hankering after such fine inner forms of martyrdom as this of Jean Valjean ; and once on the scent of such a sacrifice, nothing can keep him from bringing down his game. As Fantine was hounded down at the beginning ' by all the pack of sorrows menacing with teeth and throats,' so now is her companion in the scheme of the play. These two, after all, are the two chief people of the book. Cosette is beautiful in drawing, full of grace and delicate active charm ; but Fantine, with her shorn temples, and the cradle-song in her mutilated mouth, keeps her first place with us ; all that ruined beauty and wrecked goodness, all her frustrated love and horrible, shameful sorrow, leave about her a *prestige* such as even Tisbe or Esmeralda seems now to have missed ; the wretched handful of snow between her shoulders is more for us than M. Gillenormand's present of wedding gowns. Of Thénardier, in spite of his supple brutality and flexible impudence, we say nothing ; of his daughter only that the fourth part of the book ought to have been called *Éponine*, and that nothing in that way is more perfect than the episode concerning her ; of Gavroche and Combeferre, Courfeyrac and Mabeuf, even of the tender and brilliant poetry of Jean Pronvaire, time and space (which will no more agree to be annihilated in order to leave room for infinite commentaries than in order ' to make two lovers happy ') preclude us from speaking fitly.

We live in a bad time for commentators ; Pietro Alighieri, if he were now alive, would have to clip and dock his filial memoranda to some considerable extent. All criticism, expansive or condensed, must always be more or less imperfect, impotent and faulty, when

measured by the size and value of a great book. Without further excuse pleaded, we will add in parting that no more can be said in proof of the greatness of our Chief poet than this—that even the appearance of his latest book adds only to the quantity, it cannot raise the quality, of his fame. This book, enough of itself to cut six men’s reputations out of—to serve as a quarry of metal for celebrities to be built with—is but as a single stone in his house ; one item out of the catalogue of his claims on the reverence and admiration of men as long as any books shall be read or written at all.

## VICTOR HUGO'S PHILOSOPHY

1862

WE have expressed frequently and at length our admiration of the art evinced in this great work of Victor Hugo's. But it is very much more than a work of art, and on this its first appearance in an English dress it seems not unfitting to criticise the general drift and inner creed of a book which touches, on almost every side, the principles of human life and progress—of ethics, of society, of politics, of religion, of civilisation. And first, a word as to the translation, which is in parts strikingly good, in parts exceedingly, even wretchedly bad. Victor Hugo, speaking of the human translations of the language of Providential events which he terms 'an obscure text written in a mysterious language,' says, 'Men at once make themselves translations of it, hasty, incorrect translations, full of errors, gaps, and misunderstandings; very few minds comprehend the language; the more sagacious, the calmer and more profound decipher slowly, and when they arrive with their version, the whole work has been done long before; there are already twenty translations offered for sale.' This is, to some extent, a foreshadowing of his own fate. When his chosen translators have taken real pains, as in translating little Gavroche's slang, or the delicate shades of vanity, sensuality, kindness, evil, and good in the conversation of Éponine, and also in important political passages, like the disquisition on Louis Philippe—nothing could be better or more spirited.

But it is hard to conceive any translation much worse in other passages. The conversation of the Bishop with the dying ex-Conventionist is a model of bad translation. Sometimes again it is completely unintelligible. We are told of Madame Victurnien, that ‘ she had a small estate which she left with considerable *pallour* to a religious community ’ (vol. i. p. 152). Is this a printer’s blunder for ‘ clamour ’? The French word is *bruyamment*, ‘ noisily,’—here, of course, ‘ ostentatiously ’; ‘ with considerable clamour ’—if that was the word intended—would give an impression of shouted demands. Slovenly translations such as the following abound in the first part: ‘ In 1815, as supreme disasters were in the air, as France *had a shudder of their sinister approach, etc.*,’ which is certainly not English. Or this: ‘ for the herd, success has nearly the same profile as supremacy ’; and we have noted many passages simply unmeaning as they stand. By far the worst translated portion is the first; but ludicrous mistranslations occur at intervals throughout; for example, in the third volume we are told that ‘ M. Gillenormand’s entrails were swelled with ravishment,’ which conveys the idea of a very dangerous inflammation of the bowels. Still, as we said, the most difficult portions are admirably and very delicately translated, which renders the blundering in plain sailing less excusable.

The title chosen by Victor Hugo for this great work is not only unjust to its spirit, but a disguise for its philosophy. Misery, properly so called, we doubt if Victor Hugo could understand. His philosophy is, in this respect, dependent upon his art; and as his art is largely penetrated with the spirit of antithesis, so his philosophy blends light and darkness with far more than the usual force of artistic contrast. In this

starts or lapses. He does not seem to believe in the power of infinitesimal, or even of small changes. He absolves and condemns on the largest considerations of ruling motive, and will scarcely believe in a sin proceeding from an interior of self-denying love, or in a virtue that is alloyed with selfishness. Thus, the 'infinitely little' which, in real life, is of such vast importance, is to him morally absolutely zero—though he retains it and values it for the sake of the artistic distinctness which it gives to his painting. Every one must be either in the full sunshine or the deep shadow—and what he loves best is to picture the upheaving force which transfers from one to the other. The greatest efforts of his book are studies of the strange blending between the infinitely great and the infinitely little; of the details which rise like air-bubbles to the surface of a deeply agitated mind; the trivialities which float on the tide of revolution, the insignificances which measure the swiftness of a social gulf-stream.

Any reader of *Les Misérables* will see at once numberless illustrations of this tendency of Victor Hugo's. The central thread of the book is, in fact, a history of a convict transfigured into a saint, and the change takes place in three great eras of violent transition. In the first we have the picture of the Bishop's saintly light descending into the depths of Jean Valjean's brutalised nature, and lifting him into the full lustre of divine humility and penitence. In the second we have the struggle when, having reached the platform of social honour, he is obliged either to cast it away and become infamous, or to let an innocent man be unlawfully condemned for an old crime of his own. In the third we have the struggle between the selfish exclusiveness of his love for the only being whom he ever loved, and

there is an "I" in the Infinite below. The "I" below is the soul; the "I" above is God. *To place, in thought, the Infinite below in contact with the Infinite above, that is called "prayer."* And then, in another page, he adds what he includes in prayer; what he rejects:— 'We are of those who believe in the wretchedness of petitions (*misère des oraisons*) and in the sublimity of prayer (*prière*).' In other words, here again all that involves a *great* act, a lifting of the mind to God, Victor Hugo recognises and approves. But let this great act embody itself in specific and minute moral actions, having regard to the special state of the individual spirit, and that his philosophy rejects as belonging to the 'infinitely little.'

But it is when this antithetic creed of the great artist touchessocial and political life that we see its deficiencies most. Human institutions, if they do not rest on the finite as well as the infinite—if they do not embody the actual as well as the ideal—if they do not adapt themselves to man's limitations as well as to his indefinite capacity for progress, are not in any sense historical or fit to be historical. Yet Victor Hugo evidently would provide for men institutions that could only work if wielded by an infinite compassion in the cause of human misfortune and misery. The main purpose of this book is, perhaps, to plead for a profound and limitless compassion as the basis of the criminal system which—if it could be really compassion of so divine a kind as the Bishop of D——'s—would, no doubt, be in effect justice as well as compassion, because it would rend the conscience of the convict, and so bring with it the only penalty which is certain cure. But to base any system of criminal justice on the spurious compassion of ordinary administrators who, in their secret heart, see the guilt more in the social consequences than

in itself, would assuredly be even less safe than to base it on the present rude but definite sense of law and social justice. We may improve on Sir Joshua Jebb, but a criminal system based on mere compassion would, we fear, be infinitely worse than his.

Again, in politics, Victor Hugo looks at the national life as if it were always, or even generally, the great self-conscious unity which, in luminous moments of great political excitement, it becomes. He is a democrat who can scarcely recognise anything but the conscious life of a combined nation as deserving of political authority. He can see real progress only in those lucid moments of national vigilance in which, as he says, ‘ the whole people are dilated into the sublimated individual ’; in which ‘ there is no poor man who, having his right, has not also his radiance ’; in which ‘ the man dying of hunger feels within himself the honesty of France.’ Hence, he makes it the glory of the First Napoleon to have been in some sense, and in his best moments, ‘ the Man-people as Christ was the Man-God.’ And this is obviously the measure by which he tries political institutions: ‘ Do they really gather up and glorify the life and heart of the people? ’ We should say that, in this sense, it is not often even desirable that they should. There are various true causes and springs of national unity which are not meant to *express* the popular life, but rather to guide and educate it. Of these, monarchy and aristocracy, so far as they are elastic and capable of yielding to the progressive pressure of the popular life beneath them, are some of the most important; and these, because they do not express the infinite and absolute truth but only the finite and temporary forms of political life, Victor Hugo clearly despises. He can accept a Napoleon who is France incarnate, but not even a Louis Philippe—just



and gentle as he is to him—who is only a centre of government and a symbol of law.

The fault of Victor Hugo's philosophy seems to us to be throughout a disposition to ignore the small responsibilities, the little movements, the petty growths which make up nearly the whole of life, and to concentrate his attention on the crises of lightning or eclipse. The consequence is, that while he has the keenest of eyes for the *internecine* stages of the strife between good and evil, compassion and misery, liberty and slavery, he passes over in contempt those smaller and more limited agencies by which—whether in the field of the individual life or that of the State and the nation—the space is bridged between crisis and crisis, and lands us in the characteristic paradox of an 'anti-thetical God.'

## LA SIESTE DE JEANNE

1877

IF among the treasures and wonders unearthed on the site of Mycenæ by the prosperous devotion and fortunate energy of Dr. Schliemann there had been found, in place of some ornament wrought of mere material ore, such a far costlier relic as one of those described by the living leader of English poets, in a phrase exquisite enough even for the priceless matter in hand ; if the noble and happy labour of the now illustrious German could have been crowned by the discovery of something yet ' more golden than very gold,' more precious and marvellous than even such old-world miracles of carven metal as indeed have repaid it ; if his research had glorified the world by the gift of a fresh addition to our too scanty treasure-house of

jewels five-words-long  
That on the stretch'd forefinger of all Time  
Sparkle for ever ;

in that yet happier case, we cannot doubt that all who cherish the supreme art of speech transfigured into song would have marked the year 1876 as with a white pebble in the note-book of their memories. And if a jewel of such price was in effect thrown into that year's treasury—as unquestionably it has been—it would seem somewhat less than rational or gracious to take the less heed of it because it bears the image and superscription of no Greek demigod, but of an immortal

who has not yet put off mortality ; as surely he need not do to establish his claim to godhead by right of godlike glory and by proof of divine beneficence.

In the first week of November, 1876, the *République des Lettres* published a poem of just thirty-eight lines, *La Sieste de Jeanne*, every word of which, if any speech or memory of man endure so long, will be treasured as tenderly by generations as remote from the writer's as now treasure up with thankful wonder and reverence every golden fragment and jewelled spar from the wreck of Simonides or of Sappho. It has all the subtle tenderness, the spiritual fragrance as of a mother or a God, which invests the immortal song of Danaë ; and the union of perfect grace with living passion, as it were the suffusion of human flesh and blood with heavenly breath and fire, brings back once again upon our thoughts the name which is above every name in lyric song. There is not one line which could have been written and set where it stands by the hand of any lesser than the greatest among poets. For once even the high priest and even the high priestess of baby-worship who have made their names immortal among our own by this especial and most gracious attribute—even William Blake and Christina Rossetti for once are distanced in the race of child-consecrated song, on their own sweet ground, across their own peculiar field of Paradise. Not even in the pastures that heard his pipe keep time to the *Songs of Innocence*, or on the 'wet bird-haunted English lawn' set ringing as from nursery windows at summer sunrise to the faultless joyous music and pealing birdlike laughter of her divine *Sing-Song*, has there sounded quite such a note as this from the heaven of heavens in which little babies are adored by great poets, the frailest by the most potent of divine and human kind. Shakespeare and

Landor each did more than once a good stroke of work in the divine service of young children ; it is only out of the strong that such sweetness can come forth ; only from the mouths of lions, not dead but living, that such honey can ever be distilled. And above the work in this lovely line of all poets in all time but one, there sits and smiles eternally the adorable baby who helps us for ever to forget all passing perversities of Christianised socialism or bastard Cæsarism which disfigure and diminish the pure proportions and the noble charm of *Aurora Leigh*. Even the most worshipful children born to art in Florence, and begotten upon stone or canvas by Andrea del Sarto or by Luca della Robbia's very self, must yield to that one the crown of sinless empire and the palm of powerless godhead which attest the natural mystery of their omnipotence ; and which haply may help to explain why no accumulated abominations of cruelty and absurdity which inlay the record of its history and incrust the fabric of its creed can utterly corrode the natal beauty or corrupt the primal charm of a faith which centres at its opening round the worship of a new-born child.

The most accurate and affectionate description that I ever saw or heard given of a baby's incomparable smile, when graciously pleased to permit with courtesy and accept with kindness the votive touch of a reverential finger on its august little cheek, was given long since in the text accompanying a rich and joyous design of childish revel by Mr. Doyle ; in which, if I rightly remember, a baby in arms was contemplating the riotous delights of its elders, fallen indeed from the sovereign state of infancy, but not yet degenerate into the lower life of adults, with that bland and tacit air of a large-minded and godlike tolerance which the devout observer will not fail to have remarked in the

aspect of babies when unvexed and unincensed by any cross accident or any human shortcoming on the part of their attendant ministers. Possibly a hand which could paint that inexpressible smile might not fail also of the ability to render in mere words some sense of the ineffable quality which rests upon every line and syllable of this most divine poem. But, as it is, the best of us must be content to accept and absorb the perception of its heavenly beauty in that mood of helpless rapture which trembles between laughter and tears, suspended as it were for one sweet miraculous minute on the edge of a blind delight which divides till it combines them in a passionate confusion of their kinds. There are lines in it—but after all this is but an indirect way of saying that it is a poem by Victor Hugo—which may be taken as tests of the uttermost beauty, the extreme perfection, the supreme capacity and charm, to which the language of men can attain. As this :—

Ses beaux petits pieds nus dont le pas est peu sûr  
Dorment :

a verse beyond all comment of articulate praise or thanksgiving. I was not minded to pluck out any petal from this paradisaal rose by way of sample ; but, having once put hand to it, I must needs take heart to touch yet another leaf of its central and crowning glories :—

Donc, à l'heure où les feux du soleil sont calmants,  
Quand toute la nature écoute et se recueille,  
Vers midi, quand les nids se taisent, quand la feuille  
La plus tremblante oublie un instant de frémir,  
Jeanne a cette habitude aimable de dormir.

It might seem as if the Fates could not allow two men capable of such work in one line as that to live

together in one time of the world ; and that Shelley therefore had to die in his thirtieth year as soon as Hugo had attained his twentieth. I dare cite but one couplet more ; for what follows is too ineffably and adorably beautiful to permit another pause before the perfect end :—

On la contemple, on rit, on sent fuir la tristesse,  
Et c'est un astre, ayant de plus la petitesse.

If the last word on so divine a subject could ever be said, it surely might well be none other than this. But with workmen of the very highest order there is no such thing as a final touch, a point at which they like others are compelled to draw bridle, a summit on which even their genius also may abide but while a man takes breath, and halt without a hope or aspiration to pass beyond it. Were it not that the Master has a hundred and a thousand times in his life convinced us (half reluctant) of this truth, and confuted all possible conceit or surmise on our part that now at least here at last must be the limit of all triumph, beyond all reach or dream or vision of all the lesser sons of men, which could even for him be conceivable ; were it not that by this time we should all know better, we might now if ever claim pardon or plead excuse for the vain and hazardous assumption ; but in face of the untraversed and unsounded sea of song on whose shore we stand even now expectant of the magic argosies to come, and count the very hours as they lessen which bring us closer to the day when we shall have actually in hand the second issue of the *Légende des Siècles*, we can but possess our souls in impatience and expect what heaven will send us at our Master's inexhaustible and immortal hand.

*Note.*—Some paragraphs excerpted from this Review were embodied in *A Study of Victor Hugo*, 1886, pp. 82-85.

## RELIGIONS ET RELIGION

1880

If the sense of stupefaction could become one with the sense of rapture, and find for itself utterance or make for itself expression in words where judicial comment should be summed up and swallowed up in spiritual thanksgiving, this would be the mood and this the method in which, if in any, we might without overmuch misgiving undertake at the present date to approach the work and the name of Victor Hugo. I at least think it well to introduce the little I can hope to say on the matter by this avowal of imbecility and incompetence to do much more than 'wonder with a foolish face of praise'; by a plain and simple confession and profession of contented inadequacy and satisfied inability to revise and correct the doings and designs of our dearest and most mighty master, 'with an austere regard of control' such as might beseem the gravity of Malvolio or the more malevolent Sainte-Beuve. It is for my elders and precursors in criticism as in poetry to appeal, if they will, on this subject, from the judgment of the world to the judgment of Weimar; worth exactly and accurately as much as the final verdict of Ferney on the cognate subject of Shakespeare. It is for me and such as I am to salute in silence or in speech one of the most glorious wonders that ever the world has witnessed: the triumph at seventy-eight of a greater warrior and a more venturesome seafarer than Dandolo at ninety-

seven. Of our fleet also, who follow in his wake with our smaller craft of prose or verse, the lord high admiral is a Republican who leads us, over stormier seas than the Adriatic, to a brighter goal than Byzantium. But there is one unmistakable point of most happy difference : our foremost seaman is very far otherwise than blind.

‘ This book,’ he tells us, ‘ was begun in 1870 ; it is finished in 1880. The year 1870 gave infallibility to the Pope and Sedan to the Empire. What will the year 1880 do ? ’ Rather than hazard a conjecture on that point, we may reflect on what the greatest man in our present world has given for all time to all mankind since France shook off the venomous beast of Empire into the fatal fire of rekindled war, and Badinguet slunk forth to rot alive and dead in the appropriate shades of Chislehurst. In these ten years he has given us of poetry alone enough whereon to found the fame of ten poets. The second series of the *Légende des Siècles*, a gift too vast in its magnificence for the measure of human thanksgiving : *L’Art d’être Grand-père*, a gift too precious in its loveliness for estimate of human speech : *Le Pape*, a vision of Christ evoked before Christendom, more sweet than the sweetest music, more bitter than the bitterest tears : *La Pitié Suprême*, the very final note of heavenly mercy made manifest in divinity of wisdom and vocal through tenderness of truth. And all his gifts are given with such large and liberal ease of hand that he seems to offer and we are tempted to accept them as leaves from a tree, or fragrance from a flower, or water from a well-spring, or sunlight from the sun : we come indeed by inevitable habit to consider him in the end as no poet of our own human kind, though he love man well enough to bring us again from heaven the fire of everlasting life ;



no priest on earth of the sun-God, but the very sun of heaven itself made human in a poet as of old.

For the very shadow of this man's presence is a sunbeam of the very light indeed, and for every year that he lives there is because of him less darkness in the world. Nor ever before this has his light been turned upon a darker place than now that it is flashed full upon the creeds of human faith. The poem called *Religions et Religion* is throughout an impeachment of all mere materialism; and first and foremost of the worst existing or surviving form of materialism in the whole world. A creed which is based on deicide and sustained on theophagy is never more insupportably laughable or more laughably insupportable than when its advocates denounce or deride their antagonists as—of all opprobrious names upon earth—materialists. The men of our own day are far indeed from being the first to remark on the incomparable drollery of such a term of reproach from lips which profess belief in the mortality of an immortal, in the interruption of an eternity; but no thinker or reasoner of the past ever brought heavier or sharper weapons from the armoury of reason to the panoply of truth to bear upon the monstrous and murderous absurdities of his day than here has Victor Hugo in our own. But even Cardinal Newman's *Grammar of Assent* is not a more powerful protest in favour of sheer atheistic nihilism than is this book on behalf of the opposite creed; of revival or survival, continuity or advance in the individual existence and conscious personality of the human spirit. As all the pleading and reasoning powers of his most eloquent Eminence in that most memorable argument were lavished on demonstration of the fact or circulation of the fallacy that there is no sure refuge from the pelting storm of nihilistic dogmatism but in the bosom

of a deicidal and theophagous Christianity, so here are all the reasoning and pleading powers of a greater than he girt up to deny and to disprove it. Many a student, if I may presume to argue from one single insignificant instance, might say to the great theologian—Almost thou persuadest me to be a nihilist ; to the great free-thinker—Almost thou persuadest me to be a believer in the sure and certain immortality of the personal and individual soul.

The direct aim of this book is rather to refute the converse than the obverse of the proposition advanced by the Catholic theosophist ; to answer those who contend that positive nihilism or nihilistic positivism is inevitable if Christianity as expressed in its creeds and embodied in its sacraments be incredible, than those who argue that if dogmatic nihilism be indigestible we are bound to swallow the alternative prescription of clerical and sacramental Christianity. Singular as it may seem to certain philo-Christian disbelievers in the Catholic faith, it would hardly appear to have occurred to the bemused intelligence and limited imagination of this too presumptuous poet, that Judaism may consist or coexist with disbelief in the Creeds, or Mahometanism with disbelief in the Koran. For him, therefore, the whole question is whether there be not—as he for one is assured that there must be—an escape from the dilemma presented and obtruded by these two long-horned and sharp-edged alternatives—Christianity is certainly true, or no faith certainly is credible : on the one horn Büchner is impaled, and Newman on the other ; Pascal, one might add, in a perpetual alternation of torments, is successively impaled on both. Four principles of thought, we may say, are here impeached and impugned : a double enemy is assailed by the lover of faith and reason, love and hope, in the

militant materialism of Papists and Positivists ; by the lover of justice and mercy, humanity and freedom, in the Catholic philosophy of de Maistre and the Calvinistic misosophy of Carlyle. And if the sarcasms on theology seem to any reader more keen and violent than the satire on any other form of unbelief or infidelity to the truth as here conceived, he should remember that superstition with a lining of materialism is surely a worse thing than materialism stark naked ; and that while it is palpably possible to be a materialist without being a Christian, it is implicitly impossible to be a Christian without being a materialist.

As a sample of what we may call the first manner of this poem, we may take the following explicit and exhaustive summary of truths generally necessary to salvation :—

Vous prêtez au bon Dieu ce raisonnement-ci :

—J'ai, jadis, dans un lieu charmant et bien choisi  
 Mis la première femme avec le premier homme ;  
 Ils ont mangé, malgré ma défense, une pomme ;  
 C'est pourquoi je punis les hommes à jamais.  
 Je les fais malheureux sur terre, et leur promets  
 En enfer, où Satan dans la braise se vautre,  
 Un châtement sans fin pour la faute d'un autre.  
 Leur âme tombe en flamme et leur corps en charbon.  
 Rien de plus juste. Mais, comme je suis très bon,  
 Cela m'afflige. Hélas ! comment faire ? Une idée !  
 Je vais leur envoyer mon fils dans la Judée ;  
 Ils le tueront. Alors,—c'est pourquoi j'y consens,—  
 Ayant commis un crime, ils seront innocents.  
 Leur voyant ainsi faire une faute complète,  
 Je leur pardonnerai celle qu'ils n'ont pas faite ;  
 Ils étaient vertueux, je les rends criminels ;  
 Donc je puis leur rouvrir mes vieux bras paternels,  
 Et de cette façon cette race est sauvée,  
 Leur innocence étant par un forfait lavée.

Let us hear now the graver note of scientific or philosophic objection to the faith incarnate in the life and embodied in the teaching of Victor Hugo :—

Matière ou pur esprit, bloc sourd ou dieu sublime,  
Le monde, quel qu'il soit, c'est ce qui dans l'abîme  
N'a pas dû commencer et ne doit pas finir.  
Quelle prétention as-tu d'appartenir  
A l'unité suprême et d'en faire partie,  
Toi, fuite ! toi monade en naissant engloutie,  
Qui jettes sur le gouffre un regard insensé,  
Et qui meurs quand le cri de ta vie est poussé !

Ah ! triste Adam, flocon qui fonds presque avant  
d'être,  
Lugubre humanité, n'est-ce pas trop de naître ?  
N'est-ce pas trop d'avoir à vivre, en vérité,  
O morne genre humain, bref, rapide, emporté !  
Il ne te suffit pas, quoique ta fange souffre,  
D'apparaître une fois dans la lueur du gouffre !  
L'homme éternel, voilà ce que l'homme comprend.  
Tu demandes au ciel, au grand ciel ignorant  
Qui t'assourdit de foudre et t'aveugle d'étoiles,  
Quel fil te noue, ô mouche, à ses énormes toiles,  
Comment il tient à l'homme, et quel est ce lien ?  
Tu devrais te sentir pourtant tellement rien  
Qu'avec ce vil néant que tu nommes ta sphère  
Le ciel—en supposant qu'il soit—n'a rien à faire !  
Tout ce qu'il peut cacher, couvrir ou contenir,  
Est hors de toi, qui n'as qu'un soir pour avenir.  
O le risible effort de rattacher ce dôme  
De prodige, d'horreur et d'ombre à ton atome !  
Quel besoin as-tu donc d'être de l'univers ?  
Chair promise au tombeau, contente-toi des vers !

And, finally, let us refresh our very ' spirit of sense ' with a last deep draught of music from the closing anthem of a loftier liturgy than ever was chanted in any temple or cathedral where men worshipped otherwise than in spirit and in truth.

Vis, et fais ta journée ; aime et fais ton sommeil.  
 Vois au-dessus de toi le firmament vermeil ;  
 Regarde en toi ce ciel profond qu'on nomme l'âme ;  
 Dans ce gouffre, au zénith, resplendit une flamme.  
 Un centre de lumière inaccessible est là.  
 Hors de toi comme en toi cela brille et brilla ;  
 C'est là-bas, tout au fond, en haut du précipice.  
 Cette clarté toujours jeune, toujours propice,  
 Jamais ne s'interrompt et ne pâlit jamais ;  
 Elle sort des noirceurs, elle éclate aux sommets ;  
 La haine est de la nuit, l'ombre est de la colère !  
 Elle fait cette chose inouïe, elle éclaire.  
 Tu ne l'éteindrais pas si tu la blasphémais ;  
 Elle inspirait Orphée, elle échauffait Hermès ;  
 Elle est le formidable et tranquille prodige ;  
 L'oiseau l'a dans son nid, l'arbre l'a dans sa tige ;  
 Tout la possède, et rien ne pourrait la saisir ;  
 Elle s'offre immobile à l'éternel désir,  
 Et toujours se refuse et sans cesse se donne ;  
 C'est l'évidence énorme et simple qui pardonne ;  
 C'est l'inondation des rayons, s'épanchant  
 En astres dans un ciel, en roses dans un champ ;  
 C'est ici, là, partout, en haut, en bas, sans trêve,  
 Hier, aujourd'hui, demain, sur le fait, sur le rêve,  
 Sur le fourmillement des lueurs et des voix,  
 Sur tous les horizons de l'abîme à la fois,  
 Sur le firmament bleu, sur l'ombre inassouvie,  
 Sur l'être, le déluge immense de la vie !  
 C'est l'éblouissement auquel le regard croit.  
 De ce flamboiement naît le vrai, le bien, le droit ;  
 Il luit mystérieux dans un tourbillon d'astres ;  
 Les brumes, les noirceurs, les fléaux, les désastres  
 Fondent à sa chaleur démesurée, et tout  
 En sève, en joie, en gloire, en amour, se dissout :  
 S'il est des cœurs puissants, s'il est des âmes fermes,  
 Cela vient du torrent des souffles et des germes  
 Qui tombe à flots, jaillit, coule, et, de toutes parts,  
 Sort de ce feu vivant sur nos têtes épars.  
 Il est ! il est ! Regarde, âme. Il a son solstice,  
 La Conscience : il a son axe, la Justice ;  
 Il a son équinoxe, et c'est l'Égalité ;  
 Il a sa vaste aurore, et c'est la Liberté.

Son rayon dore en nous ce que l'âme imagine.  
Il est ! il est ! il est ! sans fin, sans origine,  
Sans éclipse, sans nuit, sans repos, sans sommeil.

Renonce, ver de terre, à créer le soleil.

It is notorious to all imbeciles that a poet, being as it were a kind of musical box in breeches to be wound up now and then for a tune, cannot possibly be a theologian, politician, or philosopher, and it is not usually supposed that a philosopher, a politician, or a theologian can (even if he would condescend to) be a poet ; though to my own poor instinct it would seem that the illustrious author of the *Dream of Gerontius* is often a true and sometimes an exquisite singer. But as on these high matters my humble opinion must of necessity be worthless, it is full time that I should turn from investigation of the substance to remark on the style of this poem. And on this subject one bolder and more eloquent than I might well be baffled. To analyse the style of the greatest among writers would need the subtlety, to praise it would need the inspiration, of their own inaccessible genius. And for a commentator of foreign name, though not wholly alien either in blood or in affection from France, it might well seem even specially presumptuous to undertake a task in which the most competent and the best willing of French critics could look only for a relative success. Thus baffled and belated on both sides, I prefer to seek refuge in brief quotation from one or two of the articles which have appeared on this poem in Parisian journals : taking first a word or two from the *Journal des Débats*.

That a man should not admire the work of Victor Hugo is conceivable ; a man may be born blind. But that any one should admire it with reservations is no longer intelligible. Do men make reservations in face of the immensity of the sea,

the greatness of a mountain, the glory of the sun? For ourselves, when we read Victor Hugo, one only feeling possesses us—that of admiration. This admiration we feel for the master's entire work, from the verses of that twentieth year which was so full of hopes, to the verses of this magnificent old age which is so full of glory. Three quarters of a century have passed over this man without bowing his head, without making the flame of his genius flicker. Victor Hugo remains robust as is his work. He bids defiance to age as his work bids defiance to time. One would think, to see his face at once grave and smiling, and still so young under its aureole of white hair, that the poet has felt not the assault but the kiss of years.

No man is more averse than I from that impertinence of personal allusion or description which European journalism would do well if it would leave to the more shameless scribblers of America; but surely no man will find in this reverent and graceful reference to an obvious and most happy truth any lack of veneration or delicate respect.

The *France* remarks, in the teeth of all malevolent affirmations to the contrary, on the absolutely loyal consistency and fidelity of Victor Hugo 'to all his manly past.' 'Only, as he advances in age, the poet quint-essentialises and *sublimates* his thought. He gives it the final form, precise and positive. Never has the verse of Victor Hugo been firmer and more supple. At one time it is all of a piece, and seems cast as it were in a single jet out of the fired imagination of the poet. At another time the verse, like the thought, folds itself back upon itself (*se replie*), breaks and meanders, and is but all the stronger and the more harmonious. In our humble opinion, never was the science of poetic speech carried further than in this book.'

'This volume,' says the *Télégraphe*, 'begins with polemics, proceeds with research, winds up with affir-

mation. The first part would delight Voltaire ; Jouvroy would not disown the second ; and Swedenborg would not feel himself much '—Blake, we may add, would not feel himself at all—' out of his own line in the last. In this sense Victor Hugo is a complete thinker, a harmonious organisation ' ( ' that 's a vile phrase,' as Polonius has it, in English), ' and this it is which accounts for his vigorous moral health, his vigorous and robust old age. The rationalist in him keeps on good terms with the mystic ; and both agree in conceding to the sceptic that share which should honestly be granted him by the weakness of our intelligence and the insufficiency of our knowledge.—The rapid success of this book is a good symptom. The public must be beginning to weary of *Assommoirs* and *Nanas* ' (heaven grant it may ! for heaven knows it is high time), ' since it can applaud the poet who opens for it an outlook on infinity.'

But far above all these, and high above any poor effort of mine at any tolerable translation, hangs the golden tribute, suspended in a golden shrine, of Théodore de Banville. The most honey-tongued of poets, the Simonides Melicertes, the Tibullus or the Tennyson of France (with a stanchless vein in him of such pure and precious humour as reminds us almost of Aristophanes at its best), has laid upon our master's altar an offering of right royal price and of most loyal love. The transfusion of this classic œnomet into the vessels of a foreign tongue is only less difficult than tempting to the taster as a task.

He writes thus—or as nearly thus as I can render his writing—in the *National* :—

In the midst of our confused life, turbulent and flat, bustling and indifferent, where books and plays, dreams and poems, driven down a wind of oblivion, are like the leaves which



November sweeps away, and fly past, without giving us time to tell one from another, in a vague whirl and rush, at times there appears a new book by Victor Hugo, and everything lights up, resounds, murmurs, and sings at once.

The shining, sounding, fascinating verse, with its thousand surprises of sound, of colour, of harmony, breaks forth like a rich concert, and ever newly stirred, dazzled and astonished, as if we were hearing verses for the first time, we remain stupefied with wonder before the persistent prodigy of the great seer, the great thinker, the unheard-of artist, self-transfigured without ceasing, always new and always like himself. It would be impertinent to say of him that he makes progress ; and yet I find no other word to express the fact that every hour, every minute, he adds something new, something yet more exact and yet more caressing, to that swing of syllables, that melodious play of rhyme renaissant of itself, which is the grace and the invincible power of French poetry—

if English ears could but learn or would but hear it ; whereas usually they have never been taught even the rudiments of French prosody, and receive the most perfect cadences of the most glorious or the most exquisite French poetry as a schoolboy who has not yet learnt scansion might receive the melodies of Catullus or of Virgil.

Let me be forgiven a seeming blasphemy ; but since the time of periphrasis is over the real truth of things must be said of them. Well, then, the great peril of poetry is the risk it runs of becoming a weariness : for it may be almost sublime and yet perfectly wearisome : but, on the contrary, with all its bewildering flight, its vast circumference, and the rage of its genius grown drunk with things immeasurable, the poetry of Victor Hugo is of itself *amusing* into the bargain—amusing as a fairy-tale, as a many-coloured festival, as a lawless and charming comedy ; for in it words play unexpected parts, take on themselves a special and intense life, put on strange or graceful faces, clash one against another either cymbals of

gold or urns of crystal, exchange flashes of living light and dawn.

And let no one suspect in my choice of an epithet any idea of diminution ; a garden-box on a window-sill may be thoroughly wearisome, and an immense forest may be amusing, with its shades wherein the nightingale sings, its giant trees with the blue sky showing through them, its mossy shelters where the silver brooklet hums its tune through the moistened greenery. Ay,—this is one of its qualities,—the poetry of Hugo can be read, can be devoured as one devours a new novel, because it is varied, surprising, full of the unforeseen, clear of commonplaces, like nature itself ; and of such a limpid clearness as to be within the reach of every creature who can read, even when it soars to the highest summits of philosophy and idealism. In fact, to be obscure, confused, unintelligible, is not a rare quality, nor one difficult to acquire ; and the first fool you may fall in with can easily attain to it. In this magnificent poem which has just appeared—as, for that matter, in all his other poems—what Victor Hugo does is just to dispel and scatter to the winds of heaven those lessons, those fogs, those rubbish-heaps, those clouds of dark bewildered words with which the sham wise men of all ages have overlaid the plain evidence of truth.

‘ The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo ’ ; and I, who cannot pretend even to the gift of eloquence proper to the son of Maia, will not presume to add a word of less valuable homage to the choicer tribute of Banville. But it may possibly not be as superfluous as assuredly it should be to remark that in his wittiest and keenest impeachment of Christianity the most Christlike of living poets neither expresses nor implies any contumelious animadversion on the divine humanity of the man once murdered by the malignity and ever since maligned by the adoration of priests.

## L'HOMME QUI RIT

1869

ONCE only in my life I have seen the likeness of Victor Hugo's genius. Crossing over when a boy from Ostend, I had the fortune to be caught in midchannel by a thunderstorm strong enough to delay the packet some three hours over the due time. About midnight the thundercloud was right overhead, full of incessant sound and fire, lightening and darkening so rapidly that it seemed to have life, and a delight in its life. At the same hour the sky was clear to the west, and all along the sea-line there sprang and sank as to music a restless dance or chase of summer lightnings across the lower sky : a race and riot of lights, beautiful and rapid as a course of shining Oceanides along the tremulous floor of the sea. Eastward at the same moment the space of clear sky was higher and wider, a splendid semi-circle of too intense purity to be called blue ; it was of no colour nameable by man ; and midway in it between the storm and the sea hung the motionless full moon ; Artemis watching with a serene splendour of scorn the battle of Titans and the revel of nymphs, from her stainless and Olympian summit of divine indifferent light. Underneath and about us the sea was paved with flame ; the whole water trembled and hissed with phosphoric fire ; even through the wind and thunder I could hear the crackling and sputtering of the water-sparks. In the same heaven and in the same hour there shone at once the three contrasted glories, golden and fiery and white, of moonlight and of the double lightnings, forked and sheet ; and under

all this miraculous heaven lay a flaming floor of water.

That, in a most close and exact symbol, is the best possible definition I can give of Victor Hugo's genius. And the impression of that hour was upon me the impression of his mind ; physical, as it touched the nerves with a more vivid passion of pleasure than music or wine ; spiritual, as it exalted the spirit with the senses and above them to the very summit of vision and delight. It is no fantastic similitude, but an accurate likeness of two causes working to the same effect. There is nothing but that delight like the delight given by some of his work. And it is because his recent book has not seldom given it me again, that I have anything here to say of it.

It is a book to be rightly read, not by the lamplight of realism, but by the sunlight of his imagination reflected upon ours. Only so shall we see it as it is, much less understand it. The beauty it has, and the meaning, are ideal ; and therefore cannot be impaired by any want of realism. Error and violation of likelihood or fact which would damn a work of Balzac's or of Thackeray's cannot even lower or lessen the rank and value of a work like this. To put it away because it has not the great and precious qualities of their school, but those of a school quite different, is just as wise as it would be on the other hand to assault the fame of Bacon on the ground that he has not written in the manner of Shakespeare ; or Newton's, because he has not written like Milton. This premised, I shall leave the dissection of names and the anatomy of probabilities to the things of chatter and chuckle so well and scientifically defined long since by Mr Charles Reade as 'anonymuncules who go scribbling about' ; there is never any lack of them ; and it will not greatly hurt the

master poet of an age that they should shriek and titter, cackle and hoot inaudibly behind his heel. It is not every demigod who is vulnerable there.

This book has in it, so to say, a certain elemental quality. It is great because it deals greatly with great emotions. It is a play played out not by human characters only; wind and sea, thunder and moonlight, have their parts too to fill. Nor is this all; for it is itself a thing like these things, living as it were an elemental life. It pierces and shakes the very roots of passion. It catches and bends the spirit as Pallas caught Achilles and bent him by the hair. Were it not so, this would be no child of the master's; but so, as always, it is. Here too the birth-mark of the great race is visible.

It is not, whatever it may seem, a novel or a study, historical or social. What touches on life or manners we see to be accidental byplay as soon as we see what the book is indeed; the story of the battle of a human spirit, first with Fate, then with the old three subordinate enemies: the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. And here I will say where the flaw, as I think, lies; for, like other great things, a great book may have a flaw. The Flesh and the Devil, Josiane and Barkilphedro, are perfect; the World is drawn wrong. And the reason is not far to seek. We all brush daily against the Flesh and the Devil, we must all rub shoulders and shake hands with them, and they are always much the same at root, only stronger and weaker with this man than with that; therefore it needs only the hand of a great poet to paint them greatly, after their true and very likeness. But the World is multi-form. To paint one aright of its many faces, you must have come close enough on that side to breathe the breath of its mouth and see by the light of its eyes. No accumulation of fact upon fact gleaned and laid up

never so carefully will avail you instead. Titian himself cannot paint without colours. Here we have canvas and easel duly made ready, but the colours are not to be had. In other words, here are many curious and accurate details painfully studied and stored up for use, but unhappily it is not seldom for misuse. Here are many social facts rightly retailed and duly laid out side by side, but no likeness of social life. Here are the Mohocks of the day, for example, much as we find them in Swift ; here is often visible even a vexatious excess of labour in the research of small things ; useless, because the collector of them has never applied his spirit to the spirit of the time in which these small things played in passing their small parts. He cannot, because that time has no attraction for him on any one side to temper the repulsion he feels from another side of it. Pure hate and scorn of an age or a people destroy the faculty of observation, much more of description, even in the historic mind ; what then will they do in the poetic ? Doubtless there has been, as doubtless there is now, much that is hateful and contemptible in social matters, English or other ; much also, as certainly, that is admirable and thankworthy. Doubtless too at one time and another there has been more visible of evil and shameful than of noble and good. But there can never have been a time of unmixed good or evil ; and he only who has felt the pulse of an age can tell us how fast or slow its heart really beat towards evil or towards good. A man who writes of a nation or a time, however bad and base in the main, without any love for it, cannot write of it well. A great English poetess has admirably said that a poet's heart may be large enough to hold two nations.<sup>1</sup> Victor Hugo's,

<sup>1</sup> I know not if it has been remarked how decisive a note of the English spirit there is in Molière, a Frenchman of the French : an English current,

apart from its heroic love of man, a love matchless except by Shelley's, holds two nations especially close, two of the greatest ; it has often been said he is French and Spanish ; that is, he loves France and Spain, the spirit of them attracts his spirit ; but he does not love England. There are great Englishmen whom no man has praised more nobly than he : but the spirit of historic England has no attraction for his. Hence, far more important than any passing errors of grotesque nomenclature or misplaced detail, the spiritual and ingrained error of the book, seen only from its social or historic side. We catch nowhere for a moment the note of English life in the reign of Anne.<sup>1</sup> Those for whom I write will know, and will see, that I do not write as a special pleader for a country or a class, as one who will see no spot in England or nobility. But indeed it is an abuse of words to say that England is governed or misgoverned by her aristocracy. A republican, studying where to strike, should read better the blazon on his enemy's shield. 'England,' I have heard it said, 'is not "a despotism tempered by epigrams," but a plutocracy modified by accidents.'

Enough now of the flaws and failures in this work ; 'enough, with over-measure.' We have yet before us the splendour of its depths and heights. Entering

as recognisable as indefinable, passing under and through the tide-stream of his genius. There is a more northern flavour mixed into his mind, a more northern tone interfused, than into any other of the great French writers, Rabelais excepted. Villon, for instance, in so many ways so like them both, is nothing if not Parisian. And if I am not wrong no third great Frenchman has ever found such acceptance and sympathy among Englishmen unimbued with the French spirit as Rabelais and Molière. For them instinct breaks down the bar of ignorance.

<sup>1</sup> For one instance, if a court lady had indeed insulted Swift, she would certainly have had by way of answer something (in De Quincey's phrase) 'too monstrously Swiftian for quotation' ; something so monstrous, that the Dean might thenceforth have held the next place to Gwynplaine in her heart.

the depths first, we come upon the evil spirit of the place. Barkilphedro, who plays here the part of devil, is a bastard begotten by Iago upon his sister, Madame de Merteuil : having something of both, but diminished and degraded ; wanting, for instance, the deep dæmonic calm of their lifelong patience. He has too much inward heat of discontent, too much fever and fire, to know their perfect peace of spirit, the equable element of their souls, the quiet of mind in which they live and work out their work at leisure. He does not sin at rest : there is somewhat of fume and fret in his wickedness. Theirs is the peace of the devil, which passeth all understanding. He, though like them sinning for sin's sake and hating for the love of hatred, has yet a too distinct and positive quality of definable evil. He is actually ungrateful, envious, false. Of them we cannot say that they are thus or thus ; in them there is a purity and simplicity of sin, which has no sensible components ; which cannot be resolved by analysis into this evil quality and that. Barkilphedro, as his maker says with profound humour, ' has his faults.' We fear that a sufficient bribe might even tempt him into virtue for a moment, seduce him to soil by a passing slip the virginity of vice. Nevertheless, as the evil spirit of envy rather than the devil absolute, he is a strong spirit and worth study. The few chapters, full of fiery eloquence and a passion bitter as blood, in which his evil soul is stripped and submitted to vivisection, contain, if read aright, the best commentary ever written on Iago. We see now at last, what no scholiast on Shakespeare could show us, how the seed may be sown and watered which in season shall bring forth so black a blossom, a poison so acrid and so sure.

In this poem as in the old pictures we see the serpent writhing, not fangless, under the foot of an angel, and



in act to bruise as of old the heel that bruises his head. Only this time it is hardly an angel of light. Unconscious of her office as another St. Michael, the Angel of the Flesh treads under the unconquerable Devil. Seen but once in full, the naked glory of the Titaness irradiates all one side of the poem with excess and superflux of splendour.

Among the fields and gardens, the mountain heights and hollows, of Victor Hugo's vast poetic kingdom, there are strange superb inmates, bird and beast of various fur and feather ; but as yet there was nothing like this. Balzac, working with other means, might have given us by dint of anxious anatomy some picture of the virgin harlot. A marvellous study we should have had, one to burn into the brain and brand the memory for ever ; but rather a thing to admire than desire. The magnetism of beauty, the effluence of attraction, he would not have given us. But now we have her from the hands of a poet as well as student, new-blown and actual as a gathered flower, in warm bloom of blood and breath, clothed with live colour, fair with significant flesh, passionately palpable. This we see first and feel, and after this the spirit. It is a strange beast that hides in this den of roses. Such have been, however, and must be. ' We are all a little mad, beginning with Venus.' Her maker's definition is complete : ' a possible Astarte latent in an actual Diana.' She is not merely spotless in body ; she is perverse, not unclean ; there is nothing of foulness in the mystic rage of her desire. She is indeed ' stainless and shameless ' ; to be unclean is common, and her ' divine depravity ' will touch nothing common or unclean. She has seven devils in her, and upon her not a fleck of filth. She has no more in common with the lewd low hirelings of the baser school of realism

than a creature of the brothel and the street has in common with the Mænads who rent in sunder the living limbs of Orpheus. We seem to hear about her the beat and clash of the terrible timbrels, the music that Æschylus set to verse, the music that made mad, the upper notes of the psalm shrill and strong as a sea-wind, the 'bull-voiced' bellowing under-song of those dread choristers from somewhere out of sight, the tempest of tambourines giving back thunder to the thunder,<sup>1</sup> the fury of divine lust that thickened with human blood the hill-streams of Cithæron.

It is no vain vaunt of the modern master's that he has given us in another guise one of these Æschylean women, a monstrous goddess, whose tone of voice 'gave a sort of Promethean grandeur to her furious and amorous words,' who had in her the tragic and Titanic passion of the women of the Eleusinian feasts 'seeking the satyrs under the stars.' And with all this fierce excess of imaginative colour and tragic intonation, the woman is modern and possible; she might be now alive, and may be. Some of her words have the light of an apocalypse, the tone of a truth indubitable henceforth and sensible to all. 'You were not born with that horrible laugh on your face, were you? no? It must be a penal mutilation. I do hope you have committed some crime.—No one has touched me, I give myself up to you as pure as burning fire, I see you do not believe me, but if you only knew how little I care!—Despise me, you that people despise. Degradation below degradation, what a pleasure! the double flower of ignominy! I am gathering it. Trample me underfoot. You will like me all the better. I know that.—Oh! I should like to be with you in the evening, while they were playing music, each of us leaning back

<sup>1</sup> Æsch., *Fr.* 54 (Hδονα!).

against the same cushion, under the purple awning of a golden galley, in the midst of the infinite sweetnesses of the sea. Insult me. Beat me. Pay me. Treat me like a street-walker. I adore you.'

The naturalism of all that is absolute ; you hear the words pant and ring. Some might doubt whether her wild citations of old stories that matched her case, her sudden fantastic allusions to these at the very height of her frenzy, were as natural : I think they are. The great poet had a right if it pleased him to give his modern Mænad the thought and the tongue of a Sappho with the place and the caprice of a Cleopatra. Such a pantheress might be such a poetess ; then between fancy and fury we should have our Bassarid complete, only with silk for fox-skin. And this might be ; for the type of spirit can hardly be rare in any luxurious age. Perversity is the fruit of weariness as weariness is the fruit of pleasure. Charles Baudelaire has often set that theme to mystic music, but in a minor key : his sweet and subtle lyrics were the prelude to this grand chorus of the master's.

We have seen the soft fierce play of the incessant summer lightnings, between the deep sky full of passing lights and dreams, and the deep sea full of the salt seed of life ; and among them Venus arising, the final and fatal flower of the mystic heaven and the ravenous sea. Looking now from west to east, we may see the moon rise, a tender tear-blinded moon, worn thin and pure, ardent and transparent.

A great poet can perfect his picture with strangely few touches. We see Virgilia as clearly as Imogen ; we see Dea as clearly as Esmeralda. Yet Imogen pervades the action of *Cymbeline*, Virgilia hardly speaks in crossing the stage of *Coriolanus*. It is not easy to write at all about the last chapters of the book ;

something divine is there, impalpable and indefinable. I must steal the word I want ; they are ' written as if in star-fire and immortal tears.' Or, to take Shakespeare's words after Carlyle's, they are ' most dearly sweet and bitter.' The pathos of Æschylus is no more like Dante's, Dante's no more like Shakespeare's, than any of these is like Hugo's. Every master of pathos has a key of his own to unlock the source of tears, or of that passionate and piteous pleasure which lies above and under the region of tears. Some, like Dante, condense the whole agony of a life into one exquisite and bitter drop of distilled pain. Others, like Shakespeare, translate it pang by pang into a complete cadence and symphony of suffering. Between Lear and Ugolino the balance can never be struck. Charles Lamb, we may remember, spent hours on the debate with a friend who upheld Dante's way of work against Shakespeare's. On which side we are to range the greatest poet of our own age, there can be no moment of question. I am not sure that he has ever touched the keys of sorrow with surer hand to deeper music than here. There is nothing in his work of a more heavenly kind ; yet, or it may be because, every word has in it the vibration of earthly emotion ; but through it rather than above, there grows and pierces a note of divine tenderness, the very passion of pity that before this has made wise men mad. Even more than the pathos of this close, its purity and exaltation are to be noted ; nothing of common is there, nothing of theatrical. And indeed it needed the supreme sweetness of Dea's reappearance, a figure translucent with divine death, a form of flesh that the light of heaven shines through more and more as the bodily veil wears thinner and consumes, to close with music and the luminous vision of a last comfort a book so full of the sound and shine of storm. With

the clamour and horror yet in our ears of that raging eloquence in which the sufferer flings into the faces of prosperous men the very flame and hell-fire of his suffering, it needed no less than this to leave the mind exalted and reconciled. But this dew of heaven is enough to quench or allay the flames of any hell. There are words of a sweetness unsurpassable, as these: 'Tout cela s'en va, et il n'y aura plus de chansons.' And upon all there dwells the measureless and nameless peace of night upon a still sea. To this quiet we have been led through all the thunder and tumult of things fatal, from the tempestuous overture of storm and whirlwind; from sea again to sea. There is a divine and terrible harmony in this chorus of the play, secretly and strangely sustained, yet so that on a full reading we feel it, though at first sight or hearing it must be missed.

Of the master's unequalled power upon natural things, upon the elements we call inanimate, knowing even less the laws of their life than of ours, there is happily no need, as surely there are no words, to speak. Part of this power we may recognise as due to the subtle and deep admixture of moral emotion and of human sentiment with the mysterious action and passion of nature. Thus in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* the wind and the sea gain strength and depth from the human figure set to fight them; from the depth and strength of the incarnate spirit so doing and suffering. Thus in this book there is a new sense and a new sublimity added to the tempest by the remorse of men sinking at once under sin and storm, drowned under a double weight of deeds and waves.

Not even in that other book is the supreme mastery of nature, the lordship of the forces of things, more admirable and wonderful than throughout the first

part of this. He who could think to describe might think to rival it. But of one point I cannot but take note ; there is nothing, even at the height of tragic horror, repellent, ugly, hateful. It has been said there is, and will be said again ; for how should there not be distorted eyes and envious tongues in the world ? Indeed a *pieuvre* is no pleasant playfellow, the ' tree of man's making ' bears a fearful fruit, the monstrous maidenhood of Josiane is no sister to the starry virginity of Dea ; but how has the great poet handled these things ? The mutilation of a child's face is a thing unbearable for thought to rest on ; but have we not seen first the face of a heroic soul ? Far elsewhere than in the work of our sovereign poet must we look for the horror which art will have none of, which nature flings back with loathing in the bringer's face. If not, we of this time who love and serve his art should indeed be in a bad case. But upon this matter we cannot permit the blind and nameless leaders of the nameless blind to decide for us. Let the serious and candid student look again for himself and see. That ' fight of the dead with the dark,' that swinging of carrion birds with the swing of the gibbeted carrion, might have been so done into words as to beget in us mere loathing ; but how is it done here ? The mighty manner of Victor Hugo has given to this ghastly matter something even of a horrible charm, a shocking splendour of effect. The rhythmic horror of the thing penetrates us not with loathing, but with a tragic awe and terror as at a real piece of the wind's work, an actual caprice of the night's, a portion of the tempest of things. So it is always ; handle what he may, the touch of a great poet will leave upon it a spell to consume and transmute whatever a weaker touch would leave in it of repulsive.

Whether or not we are now speaking of a great poet, of a name imperishable, is not a question which can be gravely deliberated. I have only to record my own poor conviction, based on some study and comparison of the men, that precisely as we now think of those judges who put Fletcher above Shakespeare, Cowley above Milton, the paid poets of Richelieu beside Corneille, and I know not whom beside Molière, will the future think of those judges who would place any poet of his age by the side of Victor Hugo. Nor has his age proved poor—it has rather been singularly rich—in men and in poets really and greatly admirable. But even had another done as well once and again as the master himself, who has done so well as much? Had he done but half, had he done but a tenth of his actual work, his supremacy, being less incontestable, would no doubt have been less contested. A parsimonious poet calculates well for his own time. Had Victor Hugo granted us but one great play—say *Marion de Lorme*, but one great lyric work—say *Les Contemplations*, but one great tragic story—say any one you please, the temptation to decry or denounce him by comparison would have been less; for with the tribe of Barkilphedro the strength of this temptation grows with the growth of the benefit conferred. And very potent is that tribe in the world of men and of letters.

As for me, I am not careful to praise or dispraise by comparison at all. I am not curious to enquire what of apparent or of actual truth there may be in any charge brought against the doer of the greatest things done, the giver of the greatest gifts given, among men in our times. Goethe found his way of work mechanical and theatrical; Milton also lived to make oblique recantation of his early praise of Shakespeare; we may, and should, wish this otherwise: yet none the

less are they all great men. It may be there is perceptible in Victor Hugo something too much of positive intention, of prepense application, of composition and forethought : what if there were ? One question stands forth first and last ; is the work done good work and great, or not ? A lesser question is this ; these that we find to be faults, are they qualities separable from the man's nature ? could we have his work without them ? If not, and if his work be great, what will it profit us to blame them or to regret ? First, at all events, let us have the sense to enjoy it and the grace to give thanks. What for example if there be in this book we have spoken of errors of language, errors historical or social ? Has it not throughout a mighty hold upon men and things, the godlike strength of grasp which only a great man can have of them ? And for quiet power of hand, for scornful sureness of satiric truth, what can exceed his study of the Queen of England (Anne) ? Has it not been steeped in the tears and the fire of live emotion ? If the style be overcharged and overshining with bright sharp strokes and points, these are no fireworks of any mechanic's fashion ; these are the phosphoric flashes of the sea-fire moving on the depth of the limitless and living sea. Enough, that the book is great and heroic, tender and strong ; full from end to end of divine and passionate love, of holy and ardent pity for men that suffer wrong at the hands of men ; full, not less, of lyric loveliness and lyric force ; and I for one am content to be simply glad and grateful : content in that simplicity of spirit to accept it as one more benefit at the hands of the supreme singer now living among us the beautiful and lofty life of one loving the race of men he serves, and of them in all time to be beloved.



## L'ANNÉE TERRIBLE

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THE man who takes upon himself the task of commentary on a book of this rank feels something of the same hesitation and reluctance come upon him which fell upon the writer at starting. He cannot at once be sure whether he does right to go forward or not. It is not that he too feels the rising tide of the bitter waters of shame ; it is not that he too sees a ' star grow lesser in heaven.' It is, if I may take up the poet's metaphor, that he sees the crowning star of a long night now dilated to a sun through the thunderclouds of the morning. He knows that this fire in heaven is indeed the fire of day ; but he finds no fitting words of welcome or thanksgiving to salute so terrible a sunrise. Once more we receive from the hands of our supreme poet a book full of light and music ; but a book written in tears and blood and characters of flame. We cannot but rejoice that it has been written, and grieve that ever it could have been. The child brought forth is visibly of divine birth, and his blood of the immortals ; but he was brought forth with heartbreak and the pangs of ' a terrible childbed.' The delight we take in the majesty and beauty of this ' mighty line ' has been dearly purchased by the bitter occasion which evoked it. Yet it cannot but be with delight that we receive so great a gift as this from the chief poet of an age, and of an age so full of light and storm, of high action and high passion, as is ours. For his hand has never been firmer, his note more clear than now ;

ἔτι γὰρ θεόθεν καταπνέει  
 πειθῶ μολπᾶν  
 ἀλκῇ ξύμφυτος αἰών·

and in these bitter and tragic pages there is a sweetness surpassing that of love-songs or songs of wine, a sweetness as of the roll of the book spread before Ezekiel, that was written within and without, 'and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe. —Then did I eat it ; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.'

It would be well that all students of this book should read together with it, as complement at once and commentary, the memorable collection, *Actes et Paroles*, 1870—1871—1872. By the light of that precious record, and by this light alone, can it be properly read. There all who will may see by what right even beyond the right of genius the greatest poet of his great nation speaks now to us as a prophet to his people : by what right of labour, by what right of sorrow, by what right of pity and of scorn, by what right of indignation and of love. None of those disciples who most honoured him in his time of banishment could have anticipated for their master a higher honour or a heavier suffering than those nineteen years of exile ; but in his own country there was reserved for him a brighter crown of honour, with a deeper draught of suffering. To defend Paris against Versailles and against itself, and to behold it wasted on the one hand with fire which was quenched on the other hand in blood : to cast from him the obloquy of men who refused to hear his defence of Garibaldi for the offence of coming to their aid, and to pass at once from the clamour of the Assembly to the silence of sudden death, beside the corpse of a beloved son ; to offer shelter to his enemies, and to be hunted from that shelter him-

self: these were things he had yet to do and to endure.

The poem opens with a prelude at once prophetic and satiric, tender and wise and full of noble scorn and nobler pity; the verse which sets a crown on the head of the people and a brand on the face of the mob is such as it is given but to one man in an age to write, and that by no means in every age. Then, for the first and fatal month of August 1870, we have a poem terrible as the occasion which called it forth, fit alike to serve as prologue to the poems of the months which follow or as an epilogue to the *Châtiments* which went before. That nothing after Sedan might be wanting to the fugitive assassin once elect of the party of Barabbas, the scourge of imperishable verse is added to the branding-iron of historic fact.

The poems of the siege at once demand and defy commentary; they should be studied in their order as parts of one tragic symphony. From the overture which tells of the old glory of Germany before turning to France with a cry of inarticulate love, to the sad majestic epilogue which seals up the sorrowful record of the days of capitulation, the various and continuous harmony flows forward through light and shadow, with bursts of thunder and tempest and interludes of sunshine and sweet air. In that last poem for February we see as it were the agony of faith; before the sight of evil inseparable from good, of good inextricable from evil, the rallying cry of hope seems for the moment, and only for the moment seems, to falter even on the lips which uttered that sovereign song of resurrection, great as the greatest old Hebrew psalm, which crowns and closes the awful roll of the *Châtiments*. For that mighty hymn of a transcendent faith in the final conscience of the world called God, in the ulti-

mate justice and universal vision of the eye and heart of things, we have but the grand unanswerable question:—

Qui donc mesurera l'ombre d'un bout à l'autre,  
Et la vie et la tombe, espaces inouïs  
Où le monceau des jours meurt sous l'amas des nuits,  
Où de vagues éclairs dans les ténèbres glissent,  
Où les extrémités des lois s'évanouissent !

In this tragic range of poems reaching from September to March there is an echo of all emotions in turn that the great spirit of a patriot and a poet could suffer and express by translation of suffering into song ; the bitter cry of invective and satire, the clear trumpet-call to defence, the triumphal wail for those who fell for France, the passionate sob of a son on the stricken bosom of a mother, the deep note of thought that slowly opens into flower of speech, and through all and after all the sweet unspeakable music of natural and simple love. After the voice which reproaches the priestlike soldier we hear the voice which rebukes the militant priest : and a fire as the fire of Juvenal is outshone by a light as the light of Lucretius. In the verses addressed ' to the Bishop who calls me Atheist,' satire is dissolved in aspiration, and the keenest edge of scorn is molten in the highest ardour of worship. The necessity of perfect disbelief in the incredible and ignoble for every soul that would attain to perfect belief in the noble and credible was never more clearly expounded or more loftily proclaimed. The fiery love and faith of the patriot find again and ever again some fresh glory of speech, some new splendour of song, in which to array themselves for everlasting ; words of hatred and horror for the greed and ravin of the enemy and his princes

who feed on gold and blood  
Till with the stain their inmost souls are dyed ;

words of wrath and scorn for the renegade friends who had no word of comfort and no hand for help in the hour of the passion of France crucified, but were seen with hands outstretched from oversea

Shaking the bloody fingers of her foes

in the presence (as they thought it) of her corpse ; words of living fire and light for love of the mother-land despised and rejected of men whose pity goes so far as to compassionate her children for the blush of shame to which their bitter fortune has condemned them, for the disgrace of being compelled to confess her for their mother :—

Ah ! je voudrais,  
Je voudrais n'être pas Français pour pouvoir dire  
Que je te choisis, France, et que, dans ton martyre,  
Je te proclame, toi que ronge le vautour.  
Ma patrie et ma gloire et mon unique amour ! <sup>1</sup>

Others who will may have the honour of that privilege, to cast the weight of their hearts upon the losing side,

<sup>1</sup> I may cite here, as in echo of this cry, the noble words just now addressed by the greatest of American voices to ' the star, the ship of France, beat back and baffled long—dim, smitten star—star panting o'er a land of death—heroic land ! ' This prophecy is from the new song of Whitman :

' Sure, as the ship of all, the Earth itself,  
Product of deathly fire and turbulent chaos,  
Forth from its spasms of fury and its poisons,  
Issuing at last in perfect power and beauty,  
Onward, beneath the sun, following its course,  
So thou, O ship of France ! '

In the notes to his essay on *Democratic Vistas* Whitman for one expresses his recognition of Hugo living and Byron dead as ' deserving so well of America ' ; which may be set against the impertinences of meaner American persons. It may likewise be remarked and remembered with pleasure that among the last printed words of Landor were two little stanzas of tributary verse in honour of the younger poet's exile. Amid the countless calumnies and insults cast upon that exile by French and English writers of the reptile kind, it is a relief to recall the greeting sent to it by a great English republican from the extreme verge of life, and from the shore of the new world by the first poet of American democracy.

to bring tribute of love and trust and reverence rather to failure than to success, to a republic bound in chains of iron than to an empire bound in chains of gold ; but men who have the lineal pulse of French blood in their veins and the traditional memories of French kindred and alliance in their hearts, men to whose forefathers in exile for their faith's sake the mighty mother has once and again opened her arms for shelter in past ages, and fostered under her wings generation after generation as her children, cannot well read such words as these without a thrill of the blood and a kindling of the memory which neither the native of France nor the kinless foreigner can wholly share.

Side by side with the ardent denunciations of German rapine and spoliation, of the hands found equally ready to seize a province or a purse, the purblind and devout incompetence of the defender who ' would rather go with sir priest than sir knight,' the soldier who for all his personal courage was ' inclined to charge the saints in heaven with the task of keeping off the danger,' is twice and thrice chastised with bitter and burning words of remonstrance. The keenest sarcasm however was in store for June, when an impertinence of this man's drew down a memorable retort on the general whose sallies were reserved for the writer ; he was somewhat chary of them during the time of the siege ; a general who might as well have taken the offensive against the enemy instead.

In sharp and sweet contrast to these stand the poems of a finer excellence, such as the letter of January 10th sent by balloon from the besieged city with its bright brave message of affection and confidence, full of the clear light laughter of French heroism not less than of its high and fiery faith. But for perfect delight and strong charm of loveliness we return at each reading

to the domestic poems as to the crowning splendour and wonder of this great book. All students have always known Victor Hugo for the supreme singer of childhood ; of its works and ways, its gladness and sadness, its earthly weakness and heavenly beauty, its indefinable attraction lying deeper than all reason can sound or all analysis resolve. Even after Shakespeare's portrait of Mamillius, and the divine cradle-songs of Blake, we are compelled to recognise in the living master the most perfect poet of little children. Circumstances have given to these present poems a colour and a pathos, a gentle glory and a luminous tenderness, which only such a framework of time and place could give. Out of the strong has come forth such sweetness, out of the lion's mouth such honey, as no smaller or weaker thing can breed. Assuredly, as the Master has said himself in that majestic prose poem inscribed with the name of Shakespeare, the mightiest mountains can outmatch even for flowers the valleys whose whole business is to rear them ; their blossoming ravines and hollows full of April can beat the meadows at their own trade ; the strongest of singers are the sweetest, and no poet of the idyllic or elegiac kind can rival even on his own peculiar ground, for tender grace and delicacy of beauty, the most potent poets of a higher order, sovereigns of lyric and of tragic song. It is *Æschylus*, and not *Euripides*, who fills the bitter air of the Scythian ravine with music of wings and words more sweet than sleep to the weary, with notes of heavenly pity and love unsubduable by fear ; who shows us with one touch of terrible tenderness the maiden agony of *Iphigenia*, smiting with the piteous dart of her eye each one of the ministers of sacrifice, in dumb show as of a picture striving to speak to them ; who throws upon the most fearful scene in all tragedy a flash of pathos unspeak-

able, when Clytæmnestra bares before the sword of her son the bosom that suckled him as he slept. What Euripidean overflow of tears and words can be matched for its own special and much vaunted quality of tender and pathetic sweetness against such instances as these of the awful sweetness and intensity of the pathos of *Æschylus*? what wailing outcry 'in the measures of a hired Cissian mourner' can be likened to these brief words that sting like tears of fire? what milder note of the lesser gods of song has in it such penetrative and piercing gentleness as the softened speech of the thunder-bearer? Where, among the poets who have never gone up to the prophetic heights or down to the tragic depths of thought and passion, is there one who can put forth when he will verse of such sweet and simple perfection as the great tragic and prophetic poet of our own age? These are some of the first verses inscribed to the baby grandchild whose pretty presence is ever and anon recalled to our mind's eye between the dark acts of the year-long tragedy:—

*Vous eûtes donc hier un an, ma bien-aimée.  
Contente, vous jasez, comme, sous la ramée,  
Au fond du nid plus tiède ouvrant de vagues yeux,  
Les oiseaux nouveau-nés gazouillent, tout joyeux  
De sentir qu'il commence à leur pousser des plumes.  
Jeanne, ta bouche est rose; et dans les gros volumes  
Dont les images font ta joie, et que je dois,  
Pour te plaire, laisser chiffonner par tes doigts,  
On trouve de beaux vers, mais pas un qui te vaille  
Quand tout ton petit corps en me voyant tressaille;  
Les plus fameux auteurs n'ont rien écrit de mieux  
Que la pensée éclore à demi dans tes yeux,  
Et que ta rêverie obscure, éparse, étrange,  
Regardant l'homme avec l'ignorance de l'ange.*

As in the look and action of a little child, so in this verse itself there is something of dim and divine pathos,



sensible in the very joy of its beauty ; something which touches men not too much used to the melting mood with a smiling sense of tears, an inner pang of delight made up of compassion and adoration before that divine weakness. In the next month's verses addressed to the child in a time of sickness the pathos is more direct and tangible ; more tender and exquisite than this it could not be. Again, in January, we have a glimpse ' between two bombardments ' of the growing and changing charm of the newly weaned angel, now ambitious to feel its feet on earth instead of the wings it left in heaven ; on terms of household intimacy with an actual kitten, and old enough to laugh at angels yet unweaned :—

À chaque pas qu'il fait, l'enfant derrière lui  
Laisse plusieurs petits fantômes de lui-même.  
On se souvient de tous, on les pleure, on les aime,  
Et ce seraient des morts s'il n'était vivant, lui.

With the one eternal exception of Shakespeare, what other poet has ever strewn the intervals of tragedy with blossoms of such breath and colour ? The very verse seems a thing of flowerlike and childlike growth, the very body of the song a piece of living nature like any bud that bursts or young life that comes forth in spring. We are reminded of the interlude in *Macbeth* made by the prattle of Macduff's child between the scenes of incantation and of murder. Beside these the student will set in the high places of remembrance the lines on a shell falling where once were the Feuillantines—that garden of now immortal blossom, of unwithering flower and fruit undecaying, where the grey-haired Master was once a fair-haired child, and watched beyond the flight of doves at sunrise the opening in heaven of the chaliced flower of dawn—in the same heaven where

now blazes over his head the horrible efflorescence of the bursting shell. 'Here his soul flew forth singing; here before his dreamy eyes sprang flowers that seemed everlasting. Here life was one thing with light; here, under the thickening foliage in April, walked his mother, whom he held by the skirt of her gown.' Here the crowding flowers 'seemed to laugh as they warmed themselves in the sun, and himself also was a flower, being a child.'

After five months of siege comes a month of mourning, and after the general agony an individual anguish. Before this we are silent; only there rises once more in our ears the unforgotten music of the fourth book of the *Contemplations*, and holds us dumb in reverence before the renewal of that august and awful sorrow.

Then come the two most terrible months of the whole hideous year; the strange vision of that Commune in which heroes were jostled by ruffians, and martyrs fell side by side with murderers; the monstrous figure of that Assembly on whose head lies all the weight of the blood shed on either side, within the city as without; the spectral unspeakable aspect of that fratricidal agony, as of some Dantesque wrestle between devils and lost souls in hell. Against the madness of the besieged as against the atrocity of the besiegers the voice of the greatest among Frenchmen was lifted up in vain. In vain he prophesied, when first a threat of murder was put forth against the hostages, of the murderous reprisals which a crime so senseless and so shameless must assuredly provoke. In vain he reclaimed for Paris, in the face of Versailles, the right of municipal self-government by her own council; in vain rebuked the untimely and inopportune haste of Paris to revindicate this right for herself in a

season of such unexampled calamity and peril. On the 23rd of April he wrote from Brussels, where the care of his fatherless grandchildren for the time detained him, a letter to the *Rappel*, suppressed in their deaf and blind insanity by men who would not hear and could not see ; in this letter he traced with the keen fidelity of science the disease to its head, and with the direct intelligence of simple reason tracked the torrent of civil war to its source ; to the action of the majority, inspired by the terror and ignorance which ere long were to impel them to the conception and perpetration of even greater crimes than they had already provoked from the ignorance and passion of their antagonists. Above all, his faithful and fearless voice was raised before both parties alike against the accursed principle of reprisals. Now as of old, as ever throughout his life of glory and of good, he called upon justice by her other name of mercy ; he claimed for all alike the equity of compassion ; he stood up to plead for all his enemies, for all the enemies of his cause—to repudiate for himself and his fellow-sufferers of past time the use of such means as had been used against themselves—of banishment, imprisonment, lifelong proscription, murder in the mass or in detail. But the plague was not so to be stayed ; and when the restored government had set itself steadily to outdo in cold blood the crimes of the conquered populace in its agony, the mighty voice which had appealed in vain against the assassins and incendiaries whose deeds had covered with just or unjust dishonour the name of the fallen party, who had confused in the sight of Europe their own evil works with the noble dreams and deeds of better men, and sullied with the fumes of blood and fire the once sublime and stainless name of ‘ commune ’—this same voice was heard to intercede for the

outcasts of that party, to offer a refuge to fugitives from the grasp of a government yet guiltier of blood than theirs. This infamous crime had not long to wait for its reward ; a night attack on the house of the criminal with paving-stones and levers and threats of instant death. The year before, in answer to his appeal against invasion, certain bloodhounds of the press in Germany had raised such another yell as these curs in Belgium, bidding ' hang the poet at the mast-head ' ; this time the cry was '*À la lanterne !*' Never was the sanguinary frenzy of the men of revolution, as exemplified in Victor Hugo, set off in stronger relief by the mild wisdom and moderation of the men of order, as exemplified in his assailants. Moved by this consideration, the Belgian government naturally proceeded to expel the offender ; but with a remarkable want of logic omitted to offer the slightest reward to the brave men who had vindicated law and order by leading a forlorn hope against a fortress garrisoned by an old man, four women, and two children, one twenty months of age, one two years and a half. It is almost incredible that some months later the son of a minister, who had taken a leading part in this heroic work, was condemned to a fine of not less than four pounds sterling. Considering that once at least he or another of the crew did very nearly succeed in beating out the brains of the child in arms with a well-aimed flint, it is simply inexplicable that no mark of honour should have been conferred by royal or national gratitude on so daring a champion of law, so devoted a defender of social order against the horrors of imminent anarchy. In a case of this pressing danger, this mortal peril, it is not every man who would have put himself forward at such risk to protect against a force so formidable the threatened safety of society ; not even the native land

of these lion-hearted men can hope always to reproduce a breed of patriots ready to incur such hazards and undertake such feats as this in the sacred cause of their country. France has her Bayards and her Dantons, England her Sidneys and her Nelsons ; these are but common heroes, fit only to be classed with the heroes and patriots of old time, and such as their native soil might haply rear again at need ; but the most ardent and sanguine lover of his country in all Belgium can hardly hope that his fatherland will ever again bring forth a race of men worthy to be called the seed of such fathers as these ; men capable of exploits unexampled in the annals of vulgar patriotism, and from which the bravest of those above cited would assuredly have drawn back. It is hard to imagine those heroes of other countries inspired with the courage requisite to make war upon such enemies and under such conditions as could not suffice to daunt or divert from their purpose the heroes of Brussels.

Thus, as once before from Jersey, was Victor Hugo now driven from Belgium by a government which in the year of general shame contrived to attain the supreme crown of disgrace, to gather the final flower of ignominy ; a distinction not easy to win from so many rivals in the infamous race ; but theft and murder, under their magnified and multiplied forms of national robbery and civic massacre, are too common among a certain sort of conquerors to be marked out for such especial notice as an act of this singular and admirable baseness. From all unclean things, from the mouths of the priesthood and the press, from the tongues that lap blood and the throats that vomit falsehood, rose the cry of mockery and hatred ; if the preacher of peace and righteousness, the counsellor of justice and of mercy, were not a madman, he would be a ruffian ;

but the punctilious equity of episcopal journals gave him the benefit of the doubt. Yet for all this, as the poet found on leaving Brussels, it is not everybody who can impose the doom of exile ; to expulsion the foreigner may condemn you, to exile he cannot. Exile is from the fatherland alone ; a man's own country is the only one terrible to him who is cast out from it. In words full of the beauty of a divine sorrow the exile of many years has set down the difference.

From Vianden as from Brussels he continued to fulfil the duty of intercessor ; to plead for the incendiary who could not read, for the terrible and pitiable woman dragged in triumph through the laughing and raging throngs of Versailles, dumb and bleeding, with foam-flecked lips fast locked in bitterness of silence, in savage deafness that nothing can move or shake, with the look as of one 'awearied of the sun,' with a kind of fierce affright in her eyes. For all such his appeal is made to their slayers on the old sacred plea, 'Forgive them ; for they know not what they do.' Their wretchedness and their ignorance, their great want and their little knowledge, left them conscious of all that they suffered, unconscious of all that they did.

Out of the darkness of these most tragic poems of all, one stands up with the light of a great deed on it, relieved against the rest in a glory as of sunrise. It is the poem which places on everlasting record the heroism of a child of twelve, condemned to be shot after all his companions, who asked leave to go first and take his watch home to his mother, promising to come back in time to die in his turn. They let him go, laughing at the infantine shallowness of the pretence ; the little blackguard was afraid ; off with you ! He went, and returned. Even the soldiers of Thiers and Galifet

could not slaughter that boy ; the officer in command gave him his life, and the master-poet of his nation has given him immortality. The verses in which the greater of these two gifts is bestowed come like a draught of wine to the lips of one sick and faint amid all the pitiful and fearful record of evil inflicted and endured ; they refresh, rekindle, reilluminate the sunken spirit with a flush and thrill of high delight.

But it is possible to meet death with another kind of fearlessness than this, a quality which is not of the light but of the darkness ; not with divine defiance as a hero, but with desperate indifference as a slave : nor is any society sound or any state secure which has found out no way to cure this dismal readiness to be killed off, this grim facility in dying. Upon all these to whom we have made life so hard that old men and children alike are ready to leave it without a word or tear, in tragic disdain, as of men strangers to their own death, whose grave was long since ready dug in their heart ; upon all to whom we have refused the right of the body to its meat and the right of the spirit to its food, to whom we have given neither bread nor light, corporeal nurture nor intellectual ; upon the slaughtered and the banished, the hideous pits of quicklime into which the yet warm corpses of men and women were huddled, and the more hideous ships of transport between whose decks were huddled the living agonies of those condemned to the sufferings over which in the first years of the fallen empire men shuddered or wept, thinking of the innocent as well as the guilty lives crushed and worn out in that penal passage, killed by cold and heat and foul wretchedness—stifled in dens too low to stand upright in, with the sense overhead of the moving mass of the huge hurrying ship on its intolerable way ; upon all these multitudinous miseries

of all who do and suffer wrong, the single voice of charity and of reason invokes the equal dole and due of pity. At Vianden, amid all the sounds and shows of summer, the banished poet broods on the bloody problem that is not to be solved by file-firing and massacre at haphazard ; all the light of the June days is reflected in his verse, but in his soul there is no reflection but of graves dug in the street for men shot down without trial, of murder feeling its way in the dark at random, and victims dispatched by chance instead of choice. With the intense and subtle beauty of this June landscape, where the witness could see no sympathy with the human trouble of the time, we may compare that former picture of the grim glory of a November sky after sunset, seen from the invested walls of Paris, when heaven did seem in harmony with the time, and the watcher saw there a reflection of war and mourning, from the west as white as a shroud to the east as black as a pall and along the line of horizon the likeness of a blood-red sword let fall from the hand of a god after some battle with a giant of equal stature.

For all this, notwithstanding, the watchword of the poem is hope, and not despair. ' All this horror has hope in it ; the ice-cold morning chills the sky-line as with fear ; at times the day begins with such a shudder that the rising sun seems a masked attack.—The coming wave of the unknown has but a dull and livid transparency, into which the light comes but by degrees ; what it shows us, seems to float and drift in folds immeasurable. The expansion of form and number appals us, and it is horrible to see to-day in the darkness what ought only to be seen to-morrow.' By the parable of the robin's nest found in the hollow of the brazen mouth of the Waterloo lion, we are bidden see and hear the future in the womb of the present, hope



in the jaws of despair, the song of peace in the very throat of war. Thus it is but natural that the poet should hearken rather to the higher voice than to the voice of expediency, to the counsellor whose name is Reason, whose forename is Interest ; to the friendly admonition which reminds him that truth which is over-true is all but falsehood ; that in seeking the ideal you find the visionary, and become a dreamer through being too much a thinker ; that the wise man does not wish to be unjust, but fears on the other hand to be too just, and seeks a middle course between falsehood, which is the first danger, and truth, which is the second ; that Right in the rough is merely the ore from which in its crude state we have to extract the pure gold of Law ; that too much light is as sure to blind you as too much darkness, and if necessary you should not open the shutter more than half-way ; that war and the scaffold are detestable in theory, and practically serviceable : that the shop must be set up against the temple, though the money-changers were once on a time driven out of it—for the fault of Jesus was to be something too much a God ; that in all things wisdom is moderation, and from its quiet corner can remark and reprehend the flaws and excesses of the universe ; as for instance that though the sun be splendid and the spring be sweet, the one has too many beams and the other has too many roses ; this is the inconvenience of all things of the kind, and God is by no means free from exaggeration ; to imitate him is to fall into perfection—a grave risk ; all work is done better after a lesser model, and God does not always set the best example to follow. What is the use of being inaccessible ? Jesus goes too far in declining to take the offer of Beelzebub into consideration ; not that I say he ought to close with it ; but it is stupid for God to be rude when

the devil is civil ; it would have been better to say, ' I'll think it over, my good friend.' After all, man is man ; he is not wicked, and he is not good ; by no means white as snow, but by no means black as coal ; black *and* white, piebald, striped, dubious, sceptical. Seeing that men are small and their conscience dwarfish, the statesman takes their measure before he ventures anything : he astonishes them, but without any thunder-claps of genius or daring which might make their heads giddy ; he gets them up prodigies proportioned to their size. The voice of wisdom then proceeds to recapitulate all the troubles which a contrary line of conduct has brought on the scorner who still turns a deaf ear to her counsel : he has got himself stoned out of Brussels ; the rattlesnakes of the press shake their rattles at him, the clerical and imperial gazettes have brought to light all his secret sins, drunkenness, theft, avarice, inhospitality, the bad wine and lenten fare set before his guests, and so forth ; M. Veuillot is so witty as to call him pumpkin-head ; it is all his own fault ; to resist evil is doubtless a good thing, but it is a bad thing to stand alone ; to rate and rebuke success, to be rough with those who have the upper hand, is really a blockhead's trick ; all conquerors are in the right, and all that glitters is gold : the god of the winds is God, and the weathercock is the symbol of his worship.—And then there is always some little admixture of positive right in actual fact, some little residue of good discoverable in all evil, which it should be your business to seek out. If Torquemada is in power you warm yourself at the stake.—It is better to look for the real than for the true ; the reality will help you to live, the truth will be the ruin of you ; the reality is afraid of the truth.—A man's duty is just to make use of facts ; you (says the voice of good counsel) have read

it wrong: you are like a man who should take a star out of heaven to light him when a candle would serve better to see the way by. To this sound advice we see too plainly that the hearer on whom it is wasted prefers the dictation of the voice which speaks in answer, admitting that this low sort of light may have its partisans, may be found excellent and may really be useful to avoid a shock, ward off a projectile, walk well-nigh straight by in the dark cross-roads, and find your whereabouts among small duties; it serves publicans very well as a lamp for their counters; it has on its side, very naturally, the purblind, the clever, the cunning, the prudent, the discreet, those who can only see things close, those who scrutinise a spider's web. But there must be somebody on the side of the stars! somebody to stand up for brotherhood, for mercy, for honour, for right, for freedom, and for the solemn splendour of absolute truth. With all their sublimity and serenity, flowers as they are of summer everlasting, the shining constellations have need that the world they guide should bear them witness that they shine, and some man's voice be raised in every age to reassure his brothers by such cry of testimony uttered across the night; for nothing would be so terrible as an ultimate equality of good and evil, of light and darkness, in the sight of the supreme and infinite unknown world; nothing would bring so heavy an indictment against God as the mad and senseless waste of light unprofitably lost and scattered about the hollow deep of heaven without the direction of a will. This absence of will, this want of conscience in the world, the prophet of belief refuses to accept as possible. In the last poem of the book he rejects the conception of evil as triumphant in the end, of nature as a cheat so ghastly and so base that God ought to hide himself for shame, of a

heaven which shelters from sight a divine malefactor, of some one hiding behind the starry veil of the abyss who premeditates a crime, of man as having given all, the days of his life, the tears of his eyes, the blood of his heart, only to be made the august plaything of treacherous omnipotence : it would not be worth while for the winds to stir the stormy tide of our lives, for the morning to come forth of the sea and dazzle the blinded flowers with broadcast seed of diamond, for the bird to sing, or for the world to be, if fate were but a hunter on the trail of his prey, if all man's efforts brought forth but vanity, if the darkness were his child and his mother were the dust, if he rowed on night and day, putting forth his will, pouring out his blood, discovering and creating, to no end but a frightful arrival nowhither ; then might man, nothing as he is, rise up in judgment against God and take to witness the skies and stars on his behalf. But it is not so ; whence morning rises, the future shall surely rise ; the dawn is a plighted word of everlasting engagement ; the visible firmament is as it were a divine promise to pay ; and the eternal and infinite God is not bankrupt.

In the strength of this faith a man may well despise all insult and all falsehood thrown up at him, all railing and mockery of his country or his creed from the unclean lips of church pamphleteers and other such creatures of the darkness and the dirt as in all lands alike are bred from the obscurer and obscener parts of literature. These are to him no more than the foul bog-water at its foot is to the oak whose boughs are the whole forest's dome, than the unlovely insects of the dust that creep beneath it are to the marble giant, august in its mutilation—to the colossal Sphinx of rose-tinged granite, grim and great, that sits with hands on knees all through the night wherein the shaken

palm-trees shiver, waiting for its moment to speak to the sunrise, and unconscious if any reptile beslaver its base. The god has never known that a toad was stirring ; while a worm slides over him, he keeps in silence his awful mystery of hidden sound and utterance withheld ; and the swarming of centipedes without number cannot take from Memnon, suddenly struck radiant, the great and terrible voice that makes answer to the sun. Those minute and multitudinous creatures who revile and defame the great—and thereby, says Blake, ‘ blaspheme God, for there is no other God ’—have no more power to disturb the man defamed than the judges who try the Revolution at their bar and give sentence against it have power to undo its work ; their wrath and their mourning are in vain ; the long festival of the ravenous night is over, the world of darkness is in the throes of death ; the dreadful daylight has come ; the flitter-mouse is blind, the polecat strays about squealing, the glowworm has lost his glory, the fox, alas, sheds tears ; the beasts that used to go out hunting in the evening at the time when little birds go to sleep are at their last gasp ; the desolation of the wolves fills the woods full of howling ; the persecuted spectres know not what to do ; if this goes on, if this light persists in dazzling and dismaying the night-hawk and the raven, the vampire will die of hunger in the grave ; the pitiless sunbeam catches and consumes the dark.—It is to judge the crimes of the sunrise that these judges sit in session.

Meantime, amid all the alternations of troubled hope with horror and the travail of an age in labour that has not strength to bring forth, there are present things of comfort and reassurance. ‘ The children we have always with us ’ ; they are no more troubled about what we do than the bird that twitters beneath the

hornbeam, or the star that breaks into flower of light on the black skyline ; they ask God for nothing but His sun ; it is enough for little Jeanne that the sky should be blue. Over his son's and their father's grave the poet sees two little figures darkened by the dim shadow and gilded by the vague light of the dead. He speaks to them sweet and sublime words of blessing and of prophecy ; of the glad heavenly ignorance that is theirs now, of the sad great knowledge that must be one day theirs. With the last and loftiest notes of that high soft music in our ears, we will leave off our labour of citation and exposition. ' They will live to know,' he says, ' how man must live with his fate at the mercy of chance, in such fashion that he may find hereafter the truth of things conform to his vision of them here.'

Moi-même un jour, après la mort, je connaîtrai  
Mon destin que j'ignore,  
Et je me pencherai sur vous, tout pénétré  
De mystère et d'aurore.

Je saurai le secret de l'exil, du linceul  
Jeté sur votre enfance,  
Et pourquoi la justice et la douceur d'un seul  
Semble à tous une offense.

Je comprendrai pourquoi, tandis que vous chantiez,  
Dans mes branches funèbres,  
Moi qui pour tous les maux veux toutes les pitiés,  
J'avais tant de ténèbres.

Je saurai pourquoi l'ombre implacable est sur moi,  
Pourquoi tant d'hécatombes,  
Pourquoi l'hiver sans fin m'enveloppe, pourquoi  
Je m'accroïs sur des tombes ;

Pourquoi tant de combats, de larmes, de regrets,  
Et tant de tristes choses ;  
Et pourquoi Dieu voulut que je fusse un cyprès  
Quand vous étiez des roses.'

A poem having in it any element of greatness is likely to arouse many questions with regard to the poetic art in general, and certain in that case to illustrate them with fresh lights of its own. This of Victor Hugo's at once suggests two points of frequent and fruitless debate between critics of the higher kind. The first, whether poetry and politics are irreconcilable or not ; the second, whether art should prefer to deal with things immediate or with things remote. Upon both sides of either question it seems to me that even wise men have ere now been led from errors of theory to errors of decision. The well-known formula of art for art's sake, opposed as it has ever been to the practice of the poet who was so long credited with its authorship, has like other doctrines a true side to it and an untrue. Taken as an affirmative, it is a precious and everlasting truth. No work of art has any worth or life in it that is not done on the absolute terms of art ; that is not before all things and above all things a work of positive excellence as judged by the laws of the special art to whose laws it is amenable. If the rules and conditions of that art be not observed, or if the work done be not great and perfect enough to rank among its triumphs, the poem, picture, statue, is a failure irredeemable and inexcusable by any show or any proof of high purpose and noble meaning. The rule of art is not the rule of morals ; in morals the action is judged by the intention, the doer is applauded, excused, or condemned, according to the motive which induced his deed ; in art, the one question is not what you mean but what you do. Therefore, as I have said

elsewhere, the one primary requisite of art is artistic worth ; ' art for art's sake first, and then all things shall be added to her—or if not, it is a matter of quite secondary importance ; but from him that has not this one indispensable quality of the artist, shall be taken away even that which he has ; whatever merit of aspiration, sentiment, sincerity, he may naturally possess, admirable and serviceable as in other lines of work it might have been and yet may be, is here unprofitable and unpraiseworthy.' Thus far we are at one with the preachers of ' art for art ' ; we prefer for example Goethe to Körner and Sappho to Tyrtæus ; we would give many patriots for one artist, considering that civic virtue is more easily to be had than lyric genius, and that the hoarse monotony of verse lowered to the level of a Spartan understanding, however commendable such verse may be for the doctrine delivered and the duty inculcated upon all good citizens, is of less than no value to art, while there is a value beyond price and beyond thought in the Lesbian music which spends itself upon the record of fleshly fever and amorous malady. We admit then that the worth of a poem has properly nothing to do with its moral meaning or design ; that the praise of a Cæsar as sung by Virgil, of a Stuart as sung by Dryden, is preferable to the most magnanimous invective against tyranny which love of country and of liberty could wring from a Bavius or a Settle ; but on the other hand we refuse to admit that art of the highest kind may not ally itself with moral or religious passion, with the ethics or the politics of a nation or an age. It does not detract from the poetic supremacy of Æschylus and of Dante, of Milton and of Shelley, that they should have been pleased to put their art to such use : nor does it detract from the sovereign greatness of other poets that they



should have had no note of song for any such theme. In a word, the doctrine of art for art is true in the positive sense, false in the negative; sound as an affirmation, unsound as a prohibition. If it be not true that the only absolute duty of art is the duty she owes to herself, then must art be dependent on the alien conditions of subject and of aim; whereas she is dependent on herself alone, and on nothing above her or beneath; by her own law she must stand or fall, and to that alone she is responsible; by no other law can any work of art be condemned, by no other plea can it be saved. But while we refuse to any artist on any plea the licence to infringe in the least article the letter of this law, to overlook or overpass it in the pursuit of any foreign purpose, we do not refuse to him the liberty of bringing within the range of it any subject that under these conditions may be so brought and included within his proper scope of work. This liberty the men who take 'art for art' as their motto, using the words in an exclusive sense, would refuse to concede; they see with perfect clearness and accuracy that art can never be a 'handmaid' of any 'lord,' as the moralist, pietist, or politician would fain have her be; and therefore they will not allow that she can properly be even so much as an ally of anything else. So on the one side we have the judges who judge of art by her capacity to serve some other good end than the production of good work; these would leave us for instance *King John*, but would assuredly deprive us of *As You Like It*; the national devotion and patriotic fire of *King Henry V.* would suffice in their estimation to set it far above the sceptic and inconclusive meditations of *Hamlet*, the pointless and aimless beauty of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On the other side we have the judges who would ostracise every artist found guilty

of a moral sense, of the political faith or the religious emotion of patriots and heroes ; whose theory would raze the *Persæ* from the scroll of Æschylus, and leave us nothing of Dante but the *Vita Nuova*, of Milton but the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, of Shelley but the *Skylark* and the *Cloud*. In consistency the one order of fanatics would expel from the poetic commonwealth such citizens as Coleridge and Keats, the other would disfranchise such as Burns and Byron. The simple truth is that the question at issue between them is that illustrated by the old child's parable of the gold and silver shield. Art is one, but the service of art is diverse. It is equally foolish to demand of a Goethe, a Keats, or a Coleridge, the proper and natural work of a Dante, a Milton, or a Shelley, as to invert the demand ; to arraign the *Divina Commedia* in the name of *Faust*, the *Sonnet on the Massacres in Piedmont* in the name of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, or the *Ode to Liberty* in the name of *Kubla Khan*. I know nothing stranger in the history of criticism than the perversity even of eminent and exquisite critics in persistent condemnation of one great artist for his deficiency in the qualities of another. It is not that critics of the higher kind expect to gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles ; but they are too frequently surprised and indignant that they cannot find grapes on a fig-tree or figs on a vine. M. Auguste Vacquerie has remarked before me on this unreasonable expectation and consequent irritation of the critical mind, with his usual bright and swift sense of the truth—a quality which we are sure to find when a good artist has occasion to speak of his own art and the theories current with respect to it. In this matter proscription and prescription are alike unavailing ; it is equally futile to bid an artist forego the natural bent of his genius or to bid him assume the natural office

of another. If the spirit or genius proper to himself move him for instance to write political poetry, he will write it ; if it bid him abstain from any such theme and write only on personal or ideal subjects, then also he will obey ; or if ever he attempt to force his genius into unnatural service, constrain it to some alien duty, the most praiseworthy purpose imaginable will not suffice to put life or worth into the work so done. Art knows nothing of choice between the two kinds or preference of the one to the other ; she asks only that the artist shall ' follow his star ' with the faith and the fervour of Dante, whether it lead him on a path like or unlike the way of Dante's work ; the ministers of either tribe, the savours of either sacrifice, are equally excellent in her sight.

The question whether past or present afford the highest matter for high poetry and offer the noblest reward to the noble workman has been as loudly and as long debated, but is really less debatable on any rational ground than the question of the end and aim of art. It is but lost labour that the champions on one side summon us to renounce the present and all its works, and return to bathe our spirits in the purer air and living springs of the past ; it is but waste of breath for the champions of the other party to bid us break the yoke and cast off the bondage of that past, leave the dead to bury their dead, and turn from the dust and rottenness of old-world themes, epic or romantic, classical or feudal, to face the age wherein we live and move and have our being, to send forth our souls and songs in search of the wonderful and doubtful future. Art knows nothing of time ; for her there is but one tense, and all ages in her sight are alike present ; there is nothing old in her sight, and nothing new. It is true, as the one side urges, that she fears not to face

the actual aspect of the hour, to handle if it please her the immediate matters of the day ; it is true, as the other side insists, that she is free to go back when she will to the very beginnings of tradition and fetch her subject from the furthest of ancient days ; she cannot be vulgarised by the touch of the present or deadened by the contact of the past. In vain, for instance, do the first poetess of England and the first poet of America agree to urge upon their fellows or their followers the duty of confronting and expressing the spirit and the secret of their own time, its meaning and its need ; such work is worthy of a poet, but no worthier than any other work that has in it the principle of life. And a poem of the past, if otherwise as good, has in it as much of this principle as a poem of the present. If a poem cast in the mould of classic or feudal times, of Greek drama or mediæval romance, be lifeless and worthless, it is not because the subject or the form was ancient, but because the poet was inadequate to his task, incompetent to do better than a flat and feeble imitation ; had he been able to fill the old types of art with new blood and breath, the remoteness of subject and the antiquity of form would in no wise have impaired the worth and reality of his work ; he would have brought close to us the far-off loveliness and renewed for us the ancient life of his models, not by mechanical and servile transcript as of a copying clerk, but by loving and reverent emulation as of an original fellow-craftsman. No form is obsolete, no subject out of date, if the right man be there to rehandle it. To the question ' Can these bones live ? ' there is but one answer ; if the spirit and breath of art be breathed upon them indeed, and the voice prophesying upon them be indeed the voice of a prophet, then assuredly will the bones ' come together, bone to his bone ' ;

and the sinews and the flesh will come up upon them, and the skin cover them above, and the breath come into them, and they will live. For art is very life itself, and knows nothing of death; she is absolute truth, and takes no care of fact; she sees that Achilles and Ulysses are even now more actual by far than Wellington and Talleyrand; not merely more noble and more interesting as types and figures, but more positive and real; and thus it is (as Victor Hugo has himself so finely instanced it) 'that Trimalchio is alive, while the late M. Romieu is dead.' Vain as is the warning of certain critics to beware of the present and abstain from its immediate vulgarities and realities, not less vain, however nobly meant or nobly worded, is the counter admonition to 'mistrust the poet' who 'trundles back his soul' some centuries to sing of chiefs and ladies 'as dead as must be, for the greater part, the poems made on their heroic bones'; for if he be a poet indeed, these will at once be re clothed with instant flesh and re-inspired with immediate breath, as present and as true, as palpable and as precious, as anything most near and real; and if the heroic bones be still fleshless and the heroic poems lifeless, the fault is not in the bones but in the poems, not in the theme but in the singer. As vain it is, not indeed to invite the muse to new spheres and fresher fields whither also she will surely and gladly come, but to bid her 'migrate from Greece and Ionia, cross out those immensely overpaid accounts, that matter of Troy, and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings'; forsake her temples and castles of old for the new quarters which doubtless also suit her well and make her welcome; for neither epic nor romance of chivalrous quest or classic war is obsolete yet, or ever can be; there is nothing in the past extinct; no scroll is 'closed

for ever,' no legend or vision of Hellenic or feudal faith 'dissolved utterly like an exhalation': all that ever had life in it has life in it for ever; those themes only are dead which never were other than dead. 'She has left them all, and is here'; so the prophet of the new world vaunts himself in vain; she is there indeed, as he says, 'by thud of machinery and shrill steam-whistle undismayed—smiling and pleased, with palpable intent to stay'; but she has not needed for that to leave her old abodes; she is not a dependent creature of time or place, 'servile to all the skiey influences'; she need not climb mountains or cross seas to bestow on all nations at once the light of her countenance; she is omnipresent and eternal, and forsakes neither Athens nor Jerusalem, Camelot nor Troy, Argonaut nor Crusader, to dwell as she does with equal good-will among modern appliances in London and New York. All times and all places are one to her; the stuff she deals with is eternal, and eternally the same; no time or theme is inapt for her, no past or present preferable.

We do not therefore rate this present book higher or lower because it deals with actual politics and matter of the immediate day. It is true that to all who put their faith and hope in the republican principle it must bring comfort and encouragement, a sense of strength and a specialty of pleasure, quite apart from the delight in its beauty and power; but it is not on this ground that we would base its claim to the reverent study and thankful admiration of men. The first and last thing to be noted in it is the fact of its artistic price and poetic greatness. Those who share the faith and the devotion of the writer have of course good reason to rejoice that the first poet of a great age, the foremost voice of a great nation, should speak for them in the

ears of the world ; that the highest poetry of their time should take up the cause they have at heart, and set their belief to music. To have with us Victor Hugo in the present as we have Milton and Shelley in the past is not a matter to be lightly prized. Whether or not we may be at one with the master-singer on all points is a matter of less weight ; whether we have learnt to look to Rome or to Paris, regenerate and redeemed from imperial or sacerdotal damnation, for the future light and model of republican Europe, we can receive with equal sympathy the heroic utterance of the greatest Frenchman's trust in the country and the city of the Revolution. Not now, after so many days of darkness, after so many stages of terror and pity, can any lover of France be inclined to cavil at the utmost expression of loyalty, the utmost passion of worship, which the first of her sons may offer in the time of her sore need. All men's mouths were opened against the sins and shames of Paris ; stricken of her enemies, forsaken of her friends, the great city was naked to all assault of hostile hands or tongues ; she was denied and renounced of Europe ; it was time for the poet to take her part. We need not recall, though we cannot but remember, the source of all her ills ; the first and foulest crime of a fruitful and baneful series, the murder of the Roman republic by the hands of French republicans ; a crime which naturally and perforce brought forth at once its counterpart and its retribution in the minor though monstrous crime of December ; which overthrew the triumvirate in Rome, and founded the empire in Paris. For that infamous expedition against right and freedom the nation which perpetrated and the nations which permitted it have since had heavily to pay. Not from the chief criminal alone, but from all accomplices who stood silent by to

watch with folded hands the violation of all international conscience and the consummation of all international treason, has time exacted the full price of blood in blood and gold and shame. For the commission by France and the condonation by Europe of the crime which reinthrallled a people and reinstalled a priesthood, even the infliction of the second empire was not found too costly an atonement to be exacted by the terrible equity of fate. But that the scourge fell first and heaviest on those Frenchmen who had protested and struggled with all the strength of their conscience and their soul against the sin and the shame of their country, men might have watched almost 'with a bitter and severe delight' the assassination in its turn of republican France while yet red-handed from the blood of republican Rome. But it was not for the greatest of those among her sons who had resisted that execrable wrong, and being innocent of blood-guiltiness had suffered in expiation of it for nineteen years of exile—it was not for Hugo, and it is not for us, to cast in her teeth the reproach of her sin now that it has been atoned for by a heroic agony. Yet in reading these ardent and profuse invocations of France as prophetess and benefactress, fountain of light and symbol of right, we must feel now and then that some recognition of past wrong-doing, some acknowledgment of treason and violence done against the right and the light of the world, would have added weight and force to the expression of a patriotism which in default of it may be open to the enemy's charge of vulgar and uncandid partisanship, of blind and one-sided provinciality. From these as from all other charges of narrowness or shallowness, want of culture, of judgment, and of temperance, we would fain see the noble ardour and loving passion of his



faith as demonstrably clear in all men's eyes as in the main it is at bottom to those who can read it aright. To have admitted that the empire was not simply a crime and a shame imposed on France as though by accident, but an inevitable indemnity demanded for her sin against her own high mission and honour, for the indulgence of greed and envy, of the lust after mean renown and unrighteous power which is the deformed and vicious parody of that virtue of patriotism whose name it takes in vain to make it hateful, of the arrogant and rancorous jealousy which impelled her baser politicians to play the game of the Catholic faction and let loose upon free Italy the soldiers of the Republic as the bloodhounds of the Church—to have avowed and noted this as the first and strongest link in the fatal chain of cause and effect wound up from Mentana to Sedan, could but have given fresh point and fresh profit to the fiery proclamation of France rearsen and redeemed. Then the philosophy and patriotism of the poet would not have been liable to the imputation of men who are now led to confound them with the common cries and conceits of that national egotism which has led to destruction the purblind and rapacious policy of sword-play and tongue-play. As it is, if ever tempted to find fault with the violence of devotion which insists on exalting above all names the name of Paris—Paris entire, and Paris alone—without alloy or reserve of blame or regret for its follies and falsities, its windy vanities and rootless restless mobility of mind, to qualify the praise of its faith and ardour in pursuit of the light, we may do well to consider that this hymn of worship is raised rather to the ideal city, the archetypal nation, the symbolic people, of which he has prophesied in that noble dithyrambic poem in prose prefixed originally to the book called *Paris Guide*.

Whether or not that prophecy be accepted as a prediction, the speaker cannot fairly be accused of making his voice the mere echo of the blatant ignorance and strident self-assertion of the platform. Not but that some sharper word of warning or even of rebuke might perhaps have profitably tempered the warmth of his loyal and filial acclamation. With this, and with some implied admission of those good as well as evil elements in the composition of the German empire and army which gave his enemies their strength, the intellectual and historical aspect of the poem would be complete and unassailable. From all other points of view it stands out in perfect unity of relief, as an absolute type of what poetry can do with a tragic or epic subject of the poet's own time. For a continuous epic or tragedy he gives us in appearance a series of lyric episodes which once completed and harmonised are seen to fulfil the conditions and compose the structure of a great and single work of art. Thus only can such a work be done in simple and sensible accordance with that unwritten law of right which is to the artist as a natural and physical instinct.

We accept then without reserve this great gift, for which the student can pay but thanks to the master whose payment from the world is the hatred of base men and the love of noble. In the mighty roll of his works we recognise at once that it must hold a high place for ever. That intense moral passion which may elsewhere have overflowed the bounds and 'o'er-informed the tenement' of drama or romance has here a full vent in its proper sphere. This sovereign quality of the prophet is a glorious and dangerous quality for a poet. The burning impulse and masterful attraction of the soul towards ideas of justice and mercy, which make a man dedicate his genius to the immediate office

of consolation and the immediate service of right, must be liable at times to divert the course of his work and impair the process of his art. To those who accused him of not imitating in his plays the method of that supreme dramatist in whom he professed his faith, Victor Hugo has well answered that it was not his part to imitate Shakespeare or any man ; that the proof of vitality and value in the modern drama was that it had a life and a form, a body and a soul of its own. Nevertheless we may notice, with all reverence for the glorious dramatic work and fame of the first poet of our age, that on one point he might in some men's judgment have done well to follow as far as was possible to his own proper genius the method of Shakespeare. The ideal dramatist, an archetype once incarnate and made actual in the greatest of all poets, has no visible preferences ; in his capacity of artist he is incapable of personal indignation or predilection ; as Keats with subtle truth and sovereign insight has remarked, he 'has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen.'<sup>1</sup> For the time being, throughout the limits of his design, he maintains in awful equanimity of apparent abstraction the high indifference of nature or of God. Evil and good, and things and men, are in his hands as clay in the potter's, and he moulds them to the use and purpose of his art alone. What men are, and what their doings and their sufferings, he shows you face to face, and not as in a glass darkly ; to you he leaves it to comment on the action and passion set before you, to love or hate, applaud or condemn, the agents and the patients of his mundane scheme, wide as time and space, hell-deep and heaven-high. It is for you, if you please, to take part with Imogen or Desdemona against Iago or Iachimo, with Arthur

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of John Keats*, vol. i. p. 221, ed. 1848.

or Cordelia against Goneril or King John ; he is for all men, inasmuch as all are creatures and parcels of himself as artist, and of that art which ' itself is nature ' ; he is not more for Brutus than for Antony, for Portia or Volumnia than for Cleopatra. This supreme office, it is evident, can scarcely be fulfilled by a poet of whom it is possible for his most loving disciple and the son of his adoption to say, as Auguste Vacquerie has said of Victor Hugo, that all his works are acts of public virtue and charity, that his books are consecrated to the study and the relief of all sufferings, that his plays are dedicated to all the outcast and disinherited of the world. It is the general presence and predominance of this predeterminate and prepense design which has exposed his marvellous work to the charge of too deliberate and mechanical preparation, too studious premeditation of effect, too careful preoccupation of result. This in fact is the sum and sense of those imputations of calculated extravagance or preconcerted pathos and puppetry of passion done to order, outer heat of artificial fire with inner frost of spiritual cold, cast upon him by the only two famous men, among many infamous and obscure, who have attempted to impugn his greatness. But the most devout believer in Goethe's or in Heine's judgment, if not blind as well as devout, must allow that the edge of their criticism is somewhat blunted by the fact that in the same breath they decry with loud and acrid violence of accent the man generally acknowledged as chief poet of his age and country, and extol in his place the names of such other Frenchmen as no countryman of their own outside their private social set or literary party could hear cited as his rivals without a smile. If fault be found in our hearing by any critic of general note and repute with some alleged shortcoming in the genius or defect in

the workmanship of Shakespeare, of Michel Angelo, or of Handel, the force of the objection will be somewhat taken off when we find that the eminent fault-finder proposes to exalt in their stead as preferable objects of worship the works of Racine, of Guido, or of Rossini ; and in like manner we are constrained to think less of the objections taken to Hugo by the Jupiter of Weimar and the Aristophanes of Germany, when we find that Goethe offers us as a substitute for his Titanic sculptures the exquisite jewellery and faultless carvings of Prosper Mérimée ; as though one should offer to supplant the statuary 'in that small chapel of the dim St. Laurence,' not by that of the Panathenaic series, but by the white marble shrine of Orcagna in which the whole legend of the life of Mary is so tenderly and wonderfully wrought in little ; while Heine would give us, for the sun of that most active and passionate genius, its solar strength and heat, its lightning and its light, the intermittent twinkle of a planet now fiery as a shooting star, now watery as a waning moon—sweet indeed and bright for the space of its hour, and anon fallen as an exhalation in some barren and quaking bog ; would leave to France, in lieu of the divine and human harmony and glory of Hugo's mighty line, the fantastic tenderness and ardent languor, the vacuous monotonous desire and discontent, the fitful and febrile beauty of Alfred de Musset.

But whether or not there be reason in the objection that even such great works as *Marion de Lorme* and *Ruy Blas* are comparatively discoloured by this moral earnestness and strenuous preference of good to evil, or that besides this alleged distortion and diversion of art from its proper line of work, too much has been sacrificed or at least subordinated to the study of stage surprises conveyed in a constant succession of galvanic

shocks, as though to atone for neglect or violation of dramatic duty and the inner law of artistic growth and poetic propriety by excess of outward and theatrical observance of effect ; whether or not these and such-like deductions may be made from the fame of this great poet as dramatist or as novelist, in such a book as that now before us this quality is glorious only and dangerous no more. The partisanship which is the imperfection of a play is the perfection of a war-song or other national lyric, be it of lamentation, of exhortation, or of triumph. This book of song takes its place beyond question beside the greatest on that lyric list which reaches from the *Odes et Ballades* to the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois* ; such a list of labours and triumphs as what other lyrist can show ? First come the clear boyish notes of prelude, songs of earliest faith and fancy, royalist and romantic ; then the brilliant vivid ballads, full already of supple harmonies and potent masteries of music, of passion and sentiment, force and grace ; then the auroral resonance and radiance of the luminous *Orientales*, the high and tender cadences of the *Feuilles d'Automne*, the floating and changing melodies of the *Chants du Crépuscule*, the fervent and intimate echoes of the *Voix Intérieures*, the ardent and subtle refractions of *Les Rayons et les Ombres* ; each in especial of these two latter books of song crowned by one of the most perfect lyrics in all the world of art for sweetness and sublimity—the former by those stanzas on the sound of the unseen sea by night, which have in them the very heart and mystery of darkness, the very music and the very passion of wave and wind ; the other by that most wonderful and adorable poem in which all the sweet and bitter madness of love strong as death is distilled into deathless speech, the little lyric tragedy of *Gastibelza* : next, after many silent

or at least songless years, the pealing thunders and blasting sunbeams of the *Châtiments* : then a work yet wider and higher and deeper than all these, the marvellous roll of the *Contemplations*, having in it all the stored and secret treasures of youth and age, of thought and faith, of love and sorrow, of life and death ; with the mystery of the stars and the sepulchres above them and beneath : then the terrible and splendid chronicle of human evil and good, the epic and lyric *Légende des Siècles*, with its infinite variety of action and passion infernal and divine : then the subtle and full-throated carols of vigorous and various fancy built up in symmetrical modulation of elaborate symphonies by vision or by memory among the woods and streets : and now the sorrowful and stormy notes of the giant organ whose keys are the months of this *Année Terrible*. And all these make up but one division of the work of one man's life : and we know that in the yet unsounded depth of his fathomless genius, as in the sunless treasure-houses of the sea, there are still jewels of what price we know not that must in their turn see light and give light. For these we have a prayer to put up that the gift of them may not be long delayed. There are few delights in any life so high and rare as the subtle and strong delight of sovereign art and poetry ; there are none more pure and more sublime. To have read the greatest works of any great poet, to have beheld or heard the greatest works of any great painter or musician, is a possession added to the best things of life. As we pity ourselves for the loss of poems and pictures which have perished, and left of Sappho but a fragment and of Zeuxis but a name, so are we inclined to pity the dead who died too soon to enjoy the great works that we have enjoyed. At each new glory that ' swims into our ken ' we surely

feel that it is something to have lived to see this too rise. Those who might have had such an addition to the good things of their life, and were defrauded of it by delay, have reason to utter from the shades their ghostly complaint and reproach against the giver who withheld his gift from the world till they had passed out of it, and so made their lives less by one good thing, and that good thing a pleasure of great price. We know that our greatest poet living has kept back for many years some samples of his work ; and much as he has given, we are but the more impelled by consideration of that imperial munificence to desire and demand its perfect consummation. Let us not have to wait longer than must needs be for the gift of our promised treasures ; for the completion of that social and historic trilogy which has yet two parts to accomplish ; for the plays whose names are now to us as the names of the lost plays of *Æschylus*, for the poems which are as the lost poems of *Pindar* ; for the light and sustenance, the glory and the joy, which the world has yet to expect at the hands of *Victor Hugo*.

1872.



THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS  
OF VICTOR HUGO

## I

## 'THÉÂTRE EN LIBERTÉ'

1886

It is exactly two hundred and eighty-six years since the first edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* came from the press, two hundred and sixty-three since the publication of *The Tempest*. And nothing till now has appeared comparable in kind and in degree with those two masterpieces of faultless fancy and boundless imagination. The earlier in date was published sixteen years before the death of Shakespeare; the second, seven years after. The first posthumous gift of the only poet who can reasonably be regarded as the successor of Shakespeare is the first volume of dramatic verse which can be set beside them.

Between the earliest and the latest of the seven dramatic pieces comprised in this priceless volume there is a space of exactly twenty years. In the third May which had risen upon the poet in a strange land there came from the hand of an exile the most brilliant and joyous effusion of laughing fancy that ever broke into birdlike music of rippling and shining verse. Flowers, birds, and butterflies undertake the conversion of an unsexed pedant or philosopher to a sense of his natural humanity; but the conquest is reserved for the first girl who flashes across his way. The words are actually fragrant and radiant with the very perfume and the very splendour of a woodland wilderness in spring; we smell the dripping flowers, hear the clamouring birds, catch the gleam of falling rain-

drops. With Shakespearean condescension and with Shakespearean audacity the poet has dared or deigned to introduce parodies and puns into the concert of wildwood harmonies and contemplative delights; and the poetry is all the finer for the fun which brightens and relieves it. The next in date, a poem as bright and sweet, but graver and deeper in tone, was written eleven years later. In the meantime Victor Hugo had given us *Les Contemplations*, the first series of *La Légende des Siècles*, *Les Misérables*, and the essay on Shakespeare; *La Grand'mère* was written in the year that gave us *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*. It is much to say that nothing ever written by its author is touched with more exquisite tenderness and enlivened with more admirable humour than this little play; but nothing less can be said of it by any competent reader. The action is equally simple and perfect; the characters are finished and quickened in a few strokes, swift and sure as the glance of sunbeams. An old margravine, the reigning princess of some province (as we may suppose) not far from the sea-coast of Bohemia, is more troubled than ever was King Polixenes by the delinquencies of a son who has fled from ducal state to marry a low-born maiden, and lives hidden with his wife and children in a woodland solitude. Hitherto, after ten years of separation, the imperious old lady makes her way under the escort of a zealous old chamberlain allied by collateral descent to the families of Polonius and Malvolio. As a princess in her own right she has the power to annul the marriage, to clap her son into prison, and to shut up his wife in a convent. She is something of a philosopher, too, as befits a contemporary of the great Frederic and the great Voltaire, but one who thoroughly appreciates the value of the sound doctrine that many

views and opinions are good to hold and bad to act on. She withdraws out of sight and hearing of an interview between the wedded lovers which is one of the most perfect scenes in all the range of poetry for tenderness of passion and purity of ardour, but returns in time to witness the play and overhear the prattle of their three little children. It would be superfluous to say that no other poet could have written a line of this scene, or that it is actually as delightful as nature itself—as the very presence and voice of children. Nor is it needful to explain the simple and exquisite catastrophe or conclusion of a poem written in the space of seven summer days. And this is a sample of the style in which it is written :—

Dieu veut que, parfois, l'ombre ait une âme gaie ;  
 Et cette âme, c'est toi. Ma tête fatiguée  
 Se pose sur ton sein, point d'appui du proscrit.  
 L'ombre, te voyant rire, a confiance et rit.  
 Les roses pour s'ouvrir attendent que tu passes.  
 Nous sommes acceptés là-haut par les espaces,  
 Et, tu dis vrai, les champs, les halliers noirs, les monts,  
 Sont de notre parti, puisque nous nous aimons.  
 Oui, rien n'est méchant, rien, rien, pas même l'ortie.  
 Que c'est charmant, l'étang, l'aurore, la sortie  
 Des nids au point du jour, chacun risquant son vol,  
 L'herbe en fleur, Dieu partout, la nuit, le rossignol ;  
 Toute cette harmonie est une sombre joute,  
 Exquise en son mystère, et sa beauté s'ajoute  
 À la forêt, au lac, à l'étoile des cieux.  
 Le chêne, en te voyant, frémit, ce pauvre vieux ;  
 La source offre son eau, la ronce offre ses mûres,  
 Et les ruisseaux, les prés, les parfums, les murmures,  
 Semblent n'avoir pour but que d'être autour de toi.

And this melody of speaking sunshine, this radiance of visible music, came from the harbour of exile which had sent forth twelve years earlier the terrible and truly invincible armada of the *Châtiments*. Dante

writing at Verona the fourth act of *The Winter's Tale*, would be, if we could conceive that possible, the only parallel to this.

But the two longest of the dramatic poems in this collection, which are dated respectively two and four years later than this exquisite little comedy, bear upon them, for all their brightness and lightness of general form or occasional expression, the visible image and superscription of exile and suffering, the sign of heroic meditation, the seal of patriotic passion. And yet in scarcely any other work has the poet given such unbridled freedom to the flight at once of aerial fancy, of earth-born humour, and of heaven-born imagination—the three steeds yoked neck by neck to a chariot more triumphal than that of Achilles. In the romantic play which under the unromantic title of *Mangeront-ils?* conceals and reveals a combination of these concordant powers for which we can find no parallel but in Aristophanes or in Shakespeare, the wild and wayward liberty of action and evolution takes a tone of serious interest, a note of tragic dignity, from the transient passage and the posthumous influence of the centenarian white witch who is to Guanhumara as moonlight to a raging fire. The fierce and foolish king, the sedate and sneering parasite, 'un neutre à fond hostile' like Mérimée or Sainte-Beuve, the hunted and happy lovers, the joyful and helpful vagabond, merry as Autolycus and trusty as the Fool in *King Lear*, come all under the shadow of the shelter of her presence or her memory. But if any likeness may be found or fancied for any other feature of this poem in the work of other men or of Hugo himself, we can hardly be wrong in affirming that there is not in all the world of poetic invention anything in kind and in degree comparable with the majestic pathos and serene sublimity of the words in

which the wise and innocent old woman takes leave of life, and gives death welcome to her weary body and unwearied soul :—

J'ai cent ans. Hier j'ai dit : Mon agonie est proche.  
Ce matin, je m'étais mise sous une roche.  
Nous autres, les esprits et les bêtes des bois,  
Nous voulons finir loin des rumeurs et des voix ;  
Pour qui meurt, toute chose, excepté l'ombre, est fausse.  
La salamandre creuse elle-même sa fosse,  
La taupe va sous terre, et l'aigle encor plus loin,  
Dans le nuage, et l'ours veut tomber sans témoin,  
Et les tigres, rentrant leurs griffes sous leurs ventres,  
Majestueusement meurent au fond des antres ;  
Et quand on est leur femme, et leur sœur, on s'enfuit  
Ainsi qu'eux, on se cache, et l'on rend à la nuit  
Son âme, comme après la bataille, l'épée.

This calm rapture of expectation, which turns towards death with a sort of eager patience and yearning confidence in immortality, is a mood of mind familiar to all students of Hugo as the most habitual temper of his thought, the most instinctive inclination of his spirit, throughout his latter years of life. Sophocles himself has hardly given with such perfection of placid power a sense of deeper sweetness in the deep mystery of dissolution or transition out of trouble into rest :—

Je vais donc m'envoler ! je vais donc être ailleurs !  
Ah ! je vais savourer, de moi-même maîtresse,  
La fauve volupté de mourir, et l'ivresse,  
Fils, d'aller allumer mon âme à ce flambeau  
Qu'un bras tend à travers le mur noir du tombeau !

But it is mere presumption to cull here and there out of this magnificent forest of verse a handful or so of picked couplets. The scene is so absolutely unique, so wild and sweet and splendid, that neither its pathos nor its grandeur nor its depth and truth of natural

instinct can be appreciated or even apprehended except by careful and thankful assimilation of the whole.

In the spring of 1843 Victor Hugo had given to the stage the last great work which he ever deigned to submit to the ordeal of public representation ; in the winter of 1869 he wrote the dramatic poem which of all his plays has most in common with *Les Burgraves*. The Illyria in which the scene is laid bears less likeness to the romantic and fantastic Illyria of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, with its Rabelaisian laughter and its Arcadian love-making, than to the epic and tragic Rhineland in which the poet had once before assembled for comparison and contrast the representatives of three various generations. There is a space of twenty-six years, seventeen of them passed in exile, between the dates of these two great poems ; there is a perfect unity of inner concord between the inspiration of the former and the inspiration of the latter. Both have the same epic and heroic note in them, the same atmosphere about them of the forest and the mountain, the same breadth and dignity of exalted passion, the same high-thoughted harmony of primal and ideal emotions—love of country with love of child and parent, faith in human duty and the divine right of manhood, in the sureness of tragic expiation and the fulness of atoning equity. This dramatic and heroic idyl was written in the year which saw the publication of *L'Homme qui Rit* ; the last year of the infamy of France. Three years later Victor Hugo published the tragic record of *L'Année Terrible*, and wrote on a fortunate day in September one of the quaintest, brightest, and finest of his lighter philosophic poems, abounding to exuberance in touches and flashes of his ripest and most thoughtful humour. The tattered sage who enlightens the good-natured marquis on the

cognate questions of the supreme being and 'the eternal female' has in him something of Villon and something of Omar Kháyyám. Next year Hugo wrote an idyl in dialogue which recalls by more qualities than one the method and the instinct, the grace and the daring, of Theocritus ; and in the year following this the complaint of a king condemned to live in lifelong isolation of omnipotence and lifelong separation from all possible assurance of simple and self-satisfying love. These are the latest in date of the verses comprised in this volume.

Sans l'amour ce n'était pas la peine de naître,  
Et cela ne vous sert à rien d'être le maître,  
L'empereur, le César, l'homme unique et pensif.  
*Etre aimé, c'est avoir l'œil clair et décisif,*  
Le front gai, l'esprit prompt, le cœur fort, l'âme haute.  
Autrement, si les cœurs, sans que ce soit ma faute,  
Me sont fermés, tout est ingrat, rien n'est vermeil ;  
Si l'on ne m'aime pas, qu'importe le soleil  
Avec sa grande flamme inutile ? Qu'importe  
Le frais avril ouvrant aux papillons sa porte,  
Le doux mai dont j'ai droit de nier la chaleur,  
Et qu'est-ce que cela me fait que l'arbre en fleur  
Frissonne, et que le chant des oiseaux se confonde  
Avec l'hymne du vent dans la forêt profonde !

But besides these seven little plays and the bright epigrammatic prologue which introduces them in an amœbæan dialogue between Tragedy and Comedy—besides these living and imperishable flowers of exile—we know that Victor Hugo must have left other samples of his dramatic genius, for which no place has been found in this volume. For more than thirty years, we have it on the evidence of his wife and son, four acts of a tragedy long since promised lay awaiting the completion of the fifth ; the advertisement of *Les Jumeaux* was therefore no such absolute delusion as the famous



announcement of *La Quinquengrogne*, the historical romance of which not a line was ever written. And Théophile Gautier, in an article dated August 5th, 1844, on the appearance of a piratical piece of rubbish produced by two thievish playhouse hacks under the title of *Don César de Bazan*, informs us that 'Victor Hugo himself, feeling the same affection for the child of his brain that Shakespeare had for Falstaff and Beaumarchais for Figaro, has written a comedy entitled *Une Aventure de Don César de Bazan*. The resolution taken by the poet to have no more plays acted has prevented him from bringing it on the stage, but no doubt it will some day appear in the shape of a book, and the true, the only César de Bazan will then revive in his own very likeness.'

The day so long since anticipated by the most loyal and faithful of Hugo's earlier disciples has already been too long deferred. And even were the unfinished tragedy, instead of being so nearly perfect, as far from completion as Shakespeare's posthumous fragment or torso of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, we should yet have a right to it as it stands, knowing as we do that when it comes to us we shall receive it undeformed and unenlarged by any such incongruous even if not unlovely additions as were held needful to complete the last unfinished masterpiece of Shakespeare.

## II

### LA FIN DE SATAN

1886

MORE than thirty years have elapsed between the announcement and the appearance of the great religious poem which has done for the nineteenth century what was done for the thirteenth by the *Divina Commedia* and for the seventeenth by *Paradise Lost* ; which has given us, from the hand of its greatest representative writer, the fullest, the clearest, the loftiest exposition of his personal faith ; and which may therefore be not unreasonably accepted as a sign of the spiritual tone or tendency natural to the minds of its noblest and tenderest and most fearless thinkers : a tone of austere and serene hopefulness, a tendency towards profound and passionate confidence in the ultimate redemption and absorption of evil by good, of the perishable power of darkness by the eternal omnipotence of light. This great enterprise was undertaken in the third year of the author's exile, and resumed after the lapse of six years more. At the former date, we are told, he completed the first of the three projected parts into which the poem was to be divided—*The Sword, The Gibbet, The Prison*—and almost all the 'extra-human' prelude, interludes, and conclusion, which fall naturally into five several sections. In all these the first quality which strikes the reader is one more proper to Indian than to Hebrew genius : a love of enormous images, gigantic impossibilities, unimaginable exaggerations of illimitable space and immeasurable time. Only the

poet's matchless mastery of language, his incomparable command of radiant symbol and rolling music, could make a western student not all unwilling to accept this more than Cyclopean or Titanic architecture of fancy without a sense of incredulous distaste for incongruous or inconceivable conceptions. But all demur, all question, all doubt is swallowed up in wonder and delight at the glory and the beauty of the indefatigable song. The flight of the fallen archangel towards the dying sun through chaos is given with that all but unique effect which Dante alone could hitherto achieve by alternation or combination of the very homeliest with the very sublimest images or comparisons:—

Et les glaciers mêlés aux nuits qui leur ressemblent  
Se renversaient ainsi que des bêtes qui tremblent,  
Et les noirs tourbillons et les gouffres hideux  
Se courbaient éperdus, pendant qu'au-dessus d'eux,  
Volant vers l'astre ainsi qu'une flèche à la cible,  
Passait, fauve et hagard, ce suppliant terrible.

Neither Milton nor Byron—though the latter was here at his best and far above the usual level of his more ambitious writing—has equalled, or nearly equalled, the description of the deluge with which the mundane part of this poem opens:—

Le mal avait filtré dans les hommes. Par où ?  
Par l'idole ; par l'âpre ouverture que creuse  
Un culte affreux dans l'âme humaine ténébreuse.  
Ces temps noirs adoraient le spectre Isis-Lilith,  
La fille du démon, que l'Homme eut dans son lit  
Avant qu'Eve apparût sous les astres sans nombre ;  
Monstre femme que fit Satan avec de l'ombre  
Afin qu'Adam goûtât le fiel avant le miel,  
Et le baiser du gouffre avant celui du ciel.

The ensuing list of human crimes begotten by idolatry has the roll of thunder in the deepening cadence of its abrupt and resonant verse.

Ce que la mort assise au seuil noir du tombeau  
Voyait d'horreurs, faisait parler cette muette.

L'urne du gouffre alors se pencha. Le jour fuit ;  
Et tout ce qui vivait et marchait devint nuit.

The submersion and revival of the world are painted with equal force of hand and subtlety of sublime detail ; and the resurrection of the spectral goddess of evil, the surviving soul of the wicked dead world, armed with the three weapons—the nail, the staff, and the stone—used by Cain in the slaying of Abel, sets a crown of culminating terror on the tragic imaginations of the legend. For with the first of these three instruments of murder the prophetic word of the spectre proclaims that man shall make the sword, and war shall be born from the weapon of iron ; the wood shall rear him gibbets, and the stone shall build him prisons. The legend of Nimrod, in whom the sword is incarnate and war personified, composes the first book of the main poem. Its wild enormities of hyperbolical invention, which now and then recall the Eddas as well as the Vedas, are relieved by passages of such divine tenderness and sweetness as the prayer or thanksgiving of the outcast leper for the happiness of that humankind which has cast him out : an interlude of as profound and exquisite beauty as anything—though this is a bold word—in the whole range of the author's work ; perfect above all in its antiphonal contrast to the tragic monologue of the bloodthirsty eunuch, whose counsels of homicide blow ever hotter and higher the flames of the ferocity of Nimrod :—

Malheur à ce qui vit ! Malheur à ce qui luit !  
Je suis le mal, je suis le deuil, je suis la nuit.  
Malheur ! Pendant qu'au bois le loup étreint la louve,  
Pendant que l'ours ému cherche l'ourse et la trouve,

Que la femme est à l'homme, et le nid à l'oiseau,  
 Que l'air féconde l'eau tremblante, le ruisseau  
 L'herbe, et que le ramier s'accouple à la colombe,  
 Moi l'eunuque, j'ai pris pour épouse la tombe !

As it would require a fuller and more elaborate commentary than can here be undertaken to give even a summary notice of all the developments of his original idea contained in this the greatest mythical invention of the greatest among modern poets, I pass over the exquisite verses which embody the strange and subtle myth of the birth of the angel Freedom from the glance of God upon the remaining feather of the fallen archangel's fallen wings which had not shared his fall into the abyss of hell ; and I pass on at once to consideration of the magnificent poem on the Passion of Christ which seems to me the very finest part of this supernatural and spiritual epic. The only other sacred poem known to me which can from any point of view be compared to it is Milton's *Paradise Regained* ; and those only who would object to the daring reverence of the English poet's invention can logically or consistently object to the reverent daring with which the French poet also has added incidents to the evangelic record and words to the reported words of Christ. The opening picture of the world under Tiberius may be matched against anything of the same superb and terrible kind in the *Légende des Siècles*, and is as fresh, as vigorous, as new, and as original as though the poet had never done any work of the sort before :—

Cette inondation de Rome était lugubre ;  
 L'empire était partout comme une onde insalubre ;  
 Il croissait comme un fleuve épars sous des forêts,  
 Et changeait lentement l'univers en marais.  
 Les docteurs méditaient sur ce second déluge.  
 Ayant leurs livres saints pour cime et pour refuge.

Les prêtres, rattachés aux textes, au-dessus  
Des hommes débordés dans le gouffre aperçus,  
Laisaient couler sous eux ces mornes avalanches,  
Parcils à des serpents enroulés dans des branches.

Un peuple commandait, le monde subissait.  
Les jaguars, les lions, les ours pris au lacet,  
Le tigre redouté même de sa femelle,  
Rugissaient sous les pieds de Rome pêle-mêle  
Avec les nations dans le même filet.  
Partout la servitude à voix basse parlait.  
L'unique grandeur d'âme était l'insouciance.  
La force avait le droit. Qu'était la conscience ?  
De la reptilité sous de l'écrasement.  
On regardait l'autel en face et le serment,  
Et l'on se parjurait, et l'hymne et la huée  
Riaient, et l'âme humaine était diminuée.

Every line in the portraits of Herod the tetrarch and the high priest Caiaphas, which succeed this picture of a humbled world, displays the same breadth of handling and the same precision of touch. The majestic roll and pause and resonance of the verse can be matched only in the other works of the poet's ripest and richest period ; the subtle force of effect conveyed by the selection and collocation of names may be likened to that attained in the finest similar passages of Æschylus or of Milton. The licence which designates the father of the Herod then reigning as the Herod who was eaten alive by worms is, if not an oversight, an instance of such freedom in the treatment of history or tradition as reminds us rather of the mediæval poets—admirable poets in the rough, and vigorous playwrights in the bud—to whom we owe those mysteries and miracle-plays now too generally regarded as mere quaint antiquarian curiosities, but actually full of humorous and earnest life, of rude dramatic realism relieved and ennobled by interludes of lyric passion.

The condensed sweetness and the exquisite purity of the verses which describe the character and the works of Christ are not more perfect than is the massive sublimity of the magnificent harangue delivered by the doctor of the law, in which all the centuries of consecrated carnage and sacrificial massacre in honour of the almighty and implacable God of hosts are evoked as with the blast of trumpets, and pass before us with sound of storm and glitter of battle. As it ceases, the word of the new commandment replies :—

*Toute la loi d'en haut est dans un mot : aimer.*

*Peuple, cria le prêtre, on vient de blasphémer.*

The introduction of the Sibyl into a narrative constructed on the basis of the evangelic record is another instance of sympathy with the imaginative side of early mediæval faith or tradition such as coupled the names of David and the Sibyl, as cognate and coequal authorities, in the sublimest of all Christian hymns. The soliloquy of the prophetess is comparable with anything in the whole work of Victor Hugo for exaltation of passionate thought and subtlety of meditative expression ; its verbal and metrical quality is miraculous for supple and superb command of every resource possible to language when kindled into statelier music or exalted into more strenuous emotion or refined into more exquisite eloquence than can be attained by the loftiest and keenest reasoning, clothed in the choicest and purest rhetoric, to which the foremost of prose writers can attain. As from the doctor of the law we heard the voice of doctrine, of imperious orthodoxy and autocratic faith, so from the dweller among visions we hear now the voice of mysticism, of desperate meditation on the insoluble, of hopeless disdain for human weakness and presumption, of bitter and angry resigna-

tion, of bewildered and barren and unprofitable belief. From the simple gospel of good will to men, the message of service and salvation to the weak, the creed of the formalist is not more wholly alien, more utterly averse, than are the visions of the mystic.

But the second division of this book is fuller even than the first of sublime and various beauties. No commentary could explain, no panegyric could express, the quality of inspiration which animates alike the description of the outcast fire-worshipper whose trade is the making of crosses, and who reflects, when a gibbet of special size is ordered by the high priest's priestly messenger, that they seem inclined to do honour to Barabbas ; the magical charm, the inexpressible melody, the tender colour and the rapturous passion of the canticle which follows ; the splendid sweetness and simplicity of a relation which paints in more vivid detail than Tintoretto's the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem ; the deep and burning pathos of Mary Magdalene's appeal to the Virgin Mother for help in the task of saving the threatened Saviour from Judas and the priests ; the straightforward purity and fidelity of the paraphrase which versifies and expands the narrative in its progress from Gethsemane to Calvary. But in all the world of imaginative creation it would be impossible to find a conception more august, an invention more sublime, than that which brings the released Barabbas, wandering in stupefaction of bewilderment through the supernatural horror of darkness, to the foot of the cross on which his groping hands encounter the feet of Christ. The imagination is so magnificent that nothing less than Victor Hugo's incomparable power of style could possibly have sufficed to shape it into speech and transfuse it into song. He alone among all great poets of the world could have



put into the robber's mouth that cry of shame and horror which here breaks forth in thunder of denunciation against the monstrous choice of the people whose verdict has set him free :—

Oh ! si c'était à moi qu'on se fût adressé,  
Si, quand j'avais le cou scellé dans la muraille,  
Pilate était venu me trouver sur ma paille,  
S'il m'avait dit : ' Voyons, on t'en laisse le choix,  
C'est une fête, il faut mettre quelqu'un en croix,  
Ou Christ de Galilée, ou toi la bête fauve ;  
Réponds, brigand, lequel des deux veux-tu qu'on sauve ?'  
J'aurais tendu mes poings et j'aurais dit : Clouez !

If no other passage of this great poem is quite equal in direct intensity of impression to the picture of Barabbas at the cross, yet it is superfluous to say that every part which follows on this transcendent episode is worthy of the place it holds in a structure of epic and lyric song left unhappily unfinished. The close or epilogue of the second book is a stern and sorrowful impeachment of Christian crime and the religion that educes Caiaphas from Jesus. In the majestic fragment which succeeds we hear a change in the cry of the fallen archangel, from the note of a triumphant hatred and defiance to the note of a passionate and desperate love of God, renascent and reluctant, in the imperious eternity of hell.

The second great lyrical interlude of the poem, even sweeter if possible than the divine canticle of Bethphage, is the song of thanksgiving of the birds. The exquisite and melodious old metre in which it is written was first used by Victor Hugo in July 1828 ; but even the famous *orientale* in which all the graces of Ronsard and all the raptures of Belleau were at once rekindled and eclipsed can hardly be set quite beside this miracle of music, this sustained passion of praise and joyful

adoration which rings through fifty stanzas of faultless and unflagging and incomparable song. The two interludes which should have accompanied it, the chant of the stars and the hymn of the angels, are wanting ; no man's imagination will ever be competent to supply a single line of these. But apparently not much is left incomplete of the renewed soliloquy in which the raging repentance of the accuser takes up again and again the burden of its illimitable despair. Never, surely, did prophet or poet, seer or preacher, condense into such incisive utterance or expand into such passionate appeal at once the anguish of triumph and the agony of defeat ; never did any man before find such expression for the assurance of his faith that the victories of evil carry retribution within them, and that the chastisement of crime is twin-born with its consummation. The seer who saw this, the poet who cast it into speech, had got far beyond all Dantesque or Miltonic fancies, all Tartarean or purgatorial devices, by which the natural conscience ever laboured to express its yearning for righteousness in expiation, its trust in the certitude of compensatory justice :—

Pas un être ne peut souffrir sans que j'en sois.  
Je suis l'affreux milieu des douleurs. Je perçois  
Chaque pulsation de la fièvre du monde.  
Mon ouïe est le centre où se répète et gronde  
Tout le bruit ténébreux dans l'étendue épars ;  
J'entends l'ombre. O tourment ! le mal de toutes parts  
M'apporte en mon cachot sa triste joie aiguë ;  
J'entends glisser l'aspic et croître la ciguë :  
Le mal pèse sur moi du zénith au nadir ;  
La mer a beau hurler, l'avalanche bondir,  
L'orage entre-heurter les foudres qu'il secoue,  
L'éclatant zodiaque a beau tourner sa roue  
De constellations, sombre meule des cieux,  
A travers le fracas vaste et prodigieux

Des astres dont parfois le groupe énorme penche,  
 A travers l'océan, la foudre et l'avalanche  
 Roulant du haut des monts parmi les sapins verts,  
 J'entends le pas d'un crime au bout de l'univers.  
 La parole qu'on dit tout bas, qui n'est pas vraie,  
 L'obscur tressaillement du blé qu'étreint l'ivraie,  
 La gangrène qui vient mordre la plaie à vif,  
 Le chuchotement noir des flots noyant l'esquif,  
 Le silence du chien près du nid de la grive,  
 J'entends tout, je n'échappe à rien, et tout m'arrive  
 A la fois dans ce baignoire où je suis submergé ;  
 Tous les fléaux en moi retentissent ; et j'ai  
 Le contre-coup de tous les monstres ; et je songe,  
 Écoutant la fureur, la chute, le mensonge  
 De toute cette race immonde de Japhet ;  
 Je distingue le bruit mystérieux que fait  
 Dans une conscience un forfait qu'on décide ;  
 O nuit ! je sens Néron devenir parricide.

Nothing could be worthy to follow this but what follows—the wailing cry of the deathless and sleepless spirit of evil for but one hour of sleep :—

Sommeil, lieu sombre, espace ineffable, où l'on est  
 Doux comme l'aube et pur comme l'enfant qui naît !  
 Dormir, ô guérison, détachement, rosée,  
 Stupeur épanouie, immense ombre apaisée,  
 Repos sacré, douceur muette, bercement  
 Qui trempe dans les cieus les cœurs, noir et charmant !

The prelude of the third book is one of the sublimest poems which compose the mythic or symbolic part of the poet's work. In all the vast compass of that world of song where only we can find its like we can find nothing more majestic in its ardour of imagination than the myth of the angel Liberty, the description of her descent, the pictures of winter everlasting and eternal night, of the spectre which resists and perishes, of the supreme appeal which evokes at last a word from the sleeping spirit of evil. Every line, every word, is laden with significant loveliness and alive with vivid emotion.

It is a matter for infinite regret that the splendid fragment on the Bastille should be but a fragment. No more superb and terrible piece of workmanship was ever left unfinished. No section of the poem contains verses of more perfect and incisive simplicity than these :—

Quel est ce prisonnier, et comment on le nomme,  
Après dix ou douze ans personne ne le sait ;  
Pas même lui. La dalle ignore ce que c'est ;  
Le carcan le saisit au cou sans le connaître ;  
Et le ver, qui déjà goûte à sa chair peut-être,  
Ne peut dire son nom au rat qui glisse et fuit.

We can but guess and wonder from afar off with what passionate magnificence of rapture the poet would have sung the fall of the typic prison, with what subtle and inspired audacity he would have made it symbolise the end of all evil, the annihilation of hell, the redemption and resurrection of the fallen angel himself, whose work and whose dwelling-place and whose existence were exemplified and typified and embodied in that human house of torment. Only a few lines are vouchsafed us of the final utterance in which the supreme word of forgiveness, the proclamation of atonement wrought and of opposites reconciled by the angel Liberty, should have found ultimate and complete expression. But the message of the poem is none the less delivered, its mission is none the less fulfilled : we are none the less qualified to compare it, and justified in comparing it, as to scheme and execution alike, with the poems of Dante and of Milton. In sharpness of outline and precision of touch it is Dantesque rather than Miltonic ; in sustained magnificence of rolling music, in constancy of exaltation, in epic stateliness and splendour of imagery, it is Miltonic rather than Dantesque. But for absolute effect of sublimity it

can hardly be compared with the first and second books of *Paradise Lost*; its milder and wiser tone of ethics and religion does not raise it—I am not sure that it does not prevent it from rising—to the tremendous height and grandeur of moral impression produced by the heroism of Milton's irreconcilable and irredeemable archangel. The Asiatic tendency to push invention beyond the limit of what may be called permissible impossibility, which distinguishes—if we may not say disfigures—no inconsiderable part of the poem, precludes it from the attainment of such a complete hold on the reader's imaginative belief, such entire command of his deepest and most sympathetic emotion, as is at once achieved by the Satan of Milton. And this same indulgence of excess in such material fancies as rather deform than exalt the religious imagination of Hindoo mythologists deprives it no less of the crowning quality which glorifies the whole work of Dante: the logic of imagination which gives exactitude and consistency to every detail of his scheme, and makes the impossible not possible merely, but demonstrable as well as credible for all who consent to accept the first premiss or postulate of his faith. Contrast, for example, the material contradictions involved in such a myth as that of Nimrod's attempt to scale heaven, and the perfect coherence of that which makes of the Peak of Teneriffe the mountain of purgatory, with hell for its inverse descent. The materialism of Dante's invention, however quaint and even gross it may seem to modern thinkers, is utterly at one with itself throughout: the materialism of Hugo's is so self-contradictory, so inconsistent in its accumulation of incompatible impossibilities, that we cannot even imagine a momentary and fantastical acceptance of it, a passing or fanciful belief in anything

but the majestic harmony, the inexhaustible imagery, which clothe its naked incongruities with splendour. For this among other reasons I venture to prefer the second to the first division of the poem ; and of all its countless beauties and sublimities the crowning example is for me that incomparable passage in which the pathetic and passionate imagination of the poet has conceived and has realised the anguish of Barabbas at the foot of the cross of Christ.

### III

## CHOSSES VUES

1887

SUCH books as Coleridge's *Table Talk* and Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* will always hold their place among the most interesting and the most valuable of all our literary possessions ; and not least on this account, that they enable us to measure, without diminution of rational reverence or danger of unseemly disrespect, the limitations and the qualifications no less than the capacities and the achievements of the highest intelligences which have ever found expression in literature. At one moment we feel a very rapture of admiration for the marvellous accuracy of instinct, the subtle sublimation of good sense, the superb sureness of intuition, discernible and appreciable in the lightest and slightest remark which reveals the inborn force and splendour of the speaker's peculiar and incomparable faculty or ability ; at another we are startled if not saddened by the revelation of some unexpected flaw in the spiritual structure, some incongruous infirmity in the composition of his magnificent and many-sided understanding. Very singular criticisms, and predictions even stranger than these, are strewn broadcast as at random among some of the finest and wisest utterances recorded in each of those famous books ; but they do not in any least degree affect the claim of either poet on our general and grateful admiration. Servility and loyalty are so far from being akin that

they are mutually exclusive and destructive : the loyal and rational veneration of a free and serious thinker cannot coexist with the abject and superstitious acquiescence of a prostrate and unreasoning worshipper. I trust that neither Goethe nor Coleridge would have exacted or enjoyed such a tribute to his genius as the sacrifice of a disciple's conscience—the immolation of another man's freedom of thought and utterance on the altar of his assumed authority : I know that Victor Hugo would not. In the posthumous volume which gives us the register of his opinions and experiences, personal and political, during many years of life, there are many notes and memoranda of high and serious interest. There is nothing unimportant to the student of a great character and a transcendent genius even in the slightest entries ; even in the most questionable inferences from history or tradition, in the most untenable inductions or deductions from experience or from theory. His vivid and varied power of intelligence is not more generally manifest than the single-hearted fervour of his confidence, the passionate and childlike spontaneity of his charitable or indignant sympathies. This book alone would suffice to prove that the greatest writer born in the nineteenth century had wit enough for a cynic combined with enthusiasm enough for an apostle. At its very opening the summary sketch of Talleyrand is a model at once of historic and humorous analysis. ' Il était noble comme Machiavel, prêtre comme Gondi, défroqué comme Fouché, spirituel comme Voltaire et boiteux comme le diable. Il avait approché, connu, observé, pénétré, remué, retourné, approfondi, raillé, fécondé, tous les hommes de son temps, toutes les idées de son siècle.' A paltry sputter of Parisian discontent in 1839 gave occasion for one among many proofs of Victor Hugo's quiet intrepidity



and observant presence of mind, and for one among a thousand instances of the graphic and incisive power of realism which the most passionate, imaginative, and sublime of modern poets could display at will in his description of actual and often of homely or prosaic incidents. A full field for the exercise of this power was afforded by his notes, taken on the spot, of the ceremonial reinterment of Napoleon in 1840. The avowedly and obtrusively satirical description of that affair given by Thackeray has nothing in it of keener and shrewder sarcasm than we find in one or two passages of the account given by a then idolatrous admirer of the ideal Napoleon, deified and transfigured by filial and patriotic sympathies. 'Ainsi, statue de bronze en plâtre, Victoires d'or massif en carton-pierre, manteau impérial en tissu de verre, et, quinze jours après la cérémonie,—aigles à vendre.'

No honest and reasonable Englishman who may be pained or offended by the tone of certain remarks on England occurring in such of these notes as bear date under the reign of Louis Philippe, or in other books of Victor Hugo's belonging to the same period of his life, to the same stage in the evolution of his opinions and his powers, should ever forget, or fail to take duly and fully into account, the dates and the circumstances which explain what would be inexplicable and excuse what would be inexcusable except on consideration of these. In the sons of the soldiers of Napoleon we must forgive even when we cannot applaud the loyal aberrations of inherited antipathy and of national self-esteem. The illusion of unconscious rancour and unselfish vanity which inspired the singular prophecy or prevision of France and Germany banded together in the interest of progress, in the cause of civilisation, against the violence and the cunning of their allied

and common enemies, England and Russia,<sup>1</sup> can provoke now no harsher emotion than one of sorrowful though smiling pity. But readers of a future generation will surely be perplexed when they find that Frenchmen in 1847 had an impression that England could be cowed or bullied out of a position which would have been maintained with insolence against a rival who had shown himself conciliatory. Was Mr. Gladstone, they will ask themselves, the representative of English character and of English policy at a date so much earlier than that assigned by historians to the momentary humiliation of England under the cringing guidance or the passing influence of her worst ruler and her most malignant enemy?

This hereditary and unseasonable malevolence stands out strikingly in contrast with the cordial good sense of Louis Philippe's reported remarks on his reception in England three years earlier. Indeed, the general view given in these pages of the first and last king of the French is so simply and so genuinely attractive as to remind us only of the finer features in that immortal portrait, taken from memory, of the same figure in *Les Misérables*. But at least as much interest as we can feel in the son of Égalité will be universally aroused by the original of Fantine. The record of the incident which suggested one of the most famous chapters in the great work just mentioned is as vivid and pathetic as it is characteristic and illustrative of that genius of beneficence which was so great a component part of the moral and intellectual faculty of Victor Hugo. Again we may be reminded of a chapter in the same volume of his second great masterpiece in prose fiction, when we read the singularly lucid record of a dream bearing date four months after the accidental death of

<sup>1</sup> *Le Rhin* : Conclusion. 1841.

the Duke of Orleans. This record has all the tragic truthfulness of incoherence, all the vivid confusion of significant with fantastic details, which we recognise in the immortal and incomparable vision of Jean Valjean on the eve of his first great act of self-immolation. And the hand which could thus carve the outlines of the dark and chisel the features of a shadow could also transcribe or portray with the realism of a professional reporter the talk of kings and ministers, the interior of palaces and prisons, the record of political and of criminal trials, anecdotes, studies, sketches, epigrams, reflections, revolutions, deliberations, intercessions, observations, and appeals. Two characters were always more especially his, whatever other part he might be called upon by circumstances to combine with them : the student's and the mediator's. All his logic, all his reason, all his conscience, had been resolved by nature into a single quality or instinct, the principle or the impulse of universal and immitigable charity. All his argument on matters of social controversy is based on the radical and imprescriptible assumption that no counter consideration can be valid, that no other principle exists. All moral evil must in his judgment be regarded as disease, to be healed or allayed by a process of criminal sanitation ; unless indeed it be merely the consequence of social inequalities, the upshot of legal iniquities, the result of systematic dereliction on the part of the world at large. The blackest traitor and seller of blood, the most hideous assassin or infanticide, holds his life by a right as inviolable as that of the most innocent child or the most virtuous man alive.

‘Principles never prove their grandeur and their beauty more than when they defend even those whom pity itself defends no longer.’ Now, with all possible

deference for the single-hearted and single-eyed enthusiasm of benevolence which inspired this dogma, the disciple most humbly conscious of his inferiority to so great and good a man as was the master-poet of the nineteenth century might be permitted and should not shrink from availing himself of the permission to suggest that there is here either a manifest assumption or a manifest confusion of terms. What stands before us is not a principle ; it is a superstition. A superstition may be the veil of indisputable truth, the raiment of imperishable wisdom ; it may also be nothing of the sort. It is not enough for even a prophet or apostle to take in hand (as it were) a superstition, to sprinkle it with the living water of eloquence, and to say, ' In the name of faith, hope, and charity, I baptize thee, Principle.' The original sin of assumption, the inherent corruption of a fallacy, is not so lightly to be cast out. ' You have no right,' cries the preacher, ' to touch a hair of the worst man's head in the way of legal penalty.' ' That,' a hearer might reply, ' remains to be proved ; meantime, affirmation for affirmation, I maintain that I have a right, should it please me, to make slippers of his skin, dog's meat of his flesh, and mortar of his bones.' Such a retort might provoke from French philanthropy the favourite Parisian exclamation of ' Schoking ! ' But to some consciences, less tender or more tender as it may be, there is no horror more horrible than the notion that a creature convicted of such crimes as (for example) matricide on the score of avarice, professional infanticide by starvation, or deliberate murder of a little child by systematic graduation of torture, should be knowingly allowed for one unnecessary hour to desecrate creation and to outrage humanity by the survival of a monstrous and maleficent existence. To contravene the dogmatic

thesis of inviolability is not to defend the gallows or to champion the guillotine; it is simply to maintain the truth of the simple truism that, except in matters of theology, doctrine is not equivalent to proof nor authority synonymous with evidence.

It would have been well, if I may venture on the suggestion, had the editors to whom the sacred task of publication was confided thought fit to afford the student a few illustrative or explanatory notes, as simple and concise as possible, on various subjects referred to in this volume as matters of universal notoriety. It is true that the incomparable lucidity of the text leaves nothing of serious importance too difficult for the reader of a later generation to apprehend or to appreciate in its general bearing and significance; but in more instances than one a brief epitome of the actual facts, with a brief summary of the concomitant circumstances, would have enhanced at once the dramatic interest and the historic value of the record. However, what is most precious in the book is naturally independent of all such considerations. At every turn we recognise the fine insight and the accurate scrutiny of a born student 'in nature's infinite book of secrecy.' The following observation is suggested by an interview with a young prisoner under sentence of death for murder, who talked in newspaper style. 'In all the rest of the conversation I remarked this absence of natural expression. Everything fades away in sight of death except affectation. Goodnature vanishes, malevolence departs, the kindly man becomes bitter, the rough man becomes gentle, the affected man remains affected. Strange that death should touch you and not make you simple!'

That Victor Hugo, when he pleased, could be as great and as mere a naturalist, in the pure and genuine

sense of the term, as the most absolute devotee of photographic realism, a single instance in this single book would amply suffice to show. The study 'after nature' of a girl then living with a painter would have kindled the admiration of Balzac and the envy of a meaner artist. There are touches in it that remind us of Esther Gobseck, and others that remind us of Doll Tearsheet. The reality of the animal under either phase, cynical or sentimental in self-devotion or self-exposure, must be recognisable by the veriest novice in that field of scientific research.

A more tragic piece of nature is the dramatic study of Mlle. Georges in the days of her decadence, when the beauty to which Napoleon had bowed, and the genius which for two generations had ruled the stage of Paris, were eclipsed by the fiery star of Rachel, and slighted by the putative nephew of her once imperial lover. But an interest far different in kind and in degree belongs to the record of the death of Balzac—the sudden and untimely collapse of the only figure in France intellectually comparable in any way to the figure of Victor Hugo.

Few sections of this book are more remarkable than that which narrates the detection and trial of a spy before a tribunal of the exiles whose bread he had eaten and whose trust he had betrayed. And in this narrative there is nothing more noteworthy than the combination of practical sense and theoretical dogmatism in the counsels of Victor Hugo himself. Not to spare the rascal's life would have been sheer madness; there could have been no rational reply to the argument from expediency. But to the argument from principle, that there must be no such thing as a sentence of capital punishment, no more against a spy than against a parricide, it does seem singular that no

voice should have replied, No more ? Most certainly not ; if anything, less. But what man on earth could dream of asking for more ?

There are many lessons, direct and indirect, to be derived from the study of this book ; but the crowning moral of it all is given at the close, as the final result and summary of all its author's manifold experiences. That there is but one thing under heaven to which a man should bow—genius ; and but one to which a man should kneel—goodness. And while reverence endures for either, the veneration of all time will cherish the memory of Victor Hugo.

# IV

## LES JUMEAUX

1889

IN his admirable preface to his admirable translation of Shakespeare's *Pericles* the son of the greatest dramatist and poet whom the world has seen since the death of Shakespeare makes mention of an unfinished poem which for many years past must have been for hundreds and thousands of would-be readers a supreme and crowning object of intense curiosity and more intense desire. Two plays, *Torquemada* and *Les Jumeaux*, were advertised as existing, if not as forthcoming, as far back as the year 1856. In 1882 the world was enriched for ever by the appearance of *Torquemada*. Of that sublime and pathetic tragedy its author was reported to have said that he thought it 'one of his master-works'—'une de mes maîtresses œuvres.' But of the other—to the deep and bitter disappointment of us all—not a word of hint or promise was vouchsafed which might have encouraged the patient lover of poetry to possess his soul in peace, remembering the words of the author's son in 1867 :—

Sans chercher très-loin, je pourrais vous fournir la preuve qu'il peut y avoir un bien long intervalle entre la conception et la publication d'un ouvrage. Je connais depuis 1839 les quatre premiers actes d'un drame intitulé, je crois, *Les Jumeaux* qui attend encore son dénouement au fond de certain portefeuille. Une raison quelconque a ajourné jusqu'ici la terminaison de cette œuvre qui, commencée dans la seconde manière de l'auteur, sera nécessairement achevée dans la troisième.



Alas, not only was this never to be, but we now find that the four acts are but two and a half : that Hugo has left us just about as much of his *Jumeaux* as Shakespeare left of his *Two Noble Kinsmen*. And Shakespeare had the excuse of premature and unexpected death : Hugo, dying at eighty-three, had had forty-six years in which to complete the great work interrupted by illness in 1839. It is impossible not to wish, and to wish with an almost resentful or repining acerbity of regret, that some part of the time and toil devoted during so many active years of indefatigable energy to work less precious and to interests less enduring had been given to the completion of another imperishable and incomparable masterpiece. Every line of Dante, of Milton, or of Hugo, will always have its interest for special students ; but the most indiscriminately omnivorous of these would lament if the composition of the *Convito* or of *Tetrachordon* had interfered with the composition, and cut off the completion of *Paradise Lost* or the *Divina Commedia*.

Perhaps, however, explanation may in this case be less unattainable than consolation, and less inconceivable than it seems. Three times Victor Hugo undertook to deal with the unspeakably terrible and tragic subject of the old-world prison ; and three times he abandoned—or would seem to have abandoned—the intolerable and unmanageable task. *La Quinquagrogne*—the romance which was to do for the dungeon what *Notre Dame de Paris* had done for the cathedral—was never even begun : the section of *La Fin de Satan* which should have dealt with the Bastille is such a fragment as leaves the reader athirst—and astonished at the instinct which impelled the greatest of modern poets to complete his wild preternatural legend or invention of Nimrod's attack on God and leave un-

finished some of the most glorious and marvellous pages that ever thrilled with terror or fortified with pity the mind of a reader not unworthy to read them. The monstrous Asiatic extravagance of the story of Nimrod is unimpressive—except by the splendour of diction and versification—for readers unimbued with the traditions of ‘l’Inde monstrueuse et triste’; the picture of the infernal French prison, truncated and curtailed and dismembered as it is, stands out on the background of memory as one of the painter’s most awful and most beautiful successes. But he could not—we cannot suppose that he would not—finish it: and he did not finish the play which might probably have been his greatest. That is a bold word, and may well be thought something more than bold: yet I must venture to repeat it—to affirm that if this play had been carried through on the same great lines and completed in the same great style as it was begun, it must have taken precedence even of *Marion de Lorme* or *Le Roi s’amuse*, *Ruy Blas* or *Les Burgraves*. And if we were not to have it in full, and enjoy it as we enjoy *Hamlet* or *Othello*, we might surely have hoped to possess such a comparatively satisfactory fragment—such a comparatively sufficient skeleton—as Shakespeare left us in each of his two imperfect plays. We are not reduced to the hopeless and helpless necessity of conjecture as to how *Timon* was to pass away, as to how *Arcite* was to make room for *Palamon*. Shakespeare had at least sketched in something more than outline the last scene of either tragedy, and has made it clear beyond all possibility of mistake how his poem would in either case have been finished, had he lived or had he cared to finish it. But Hugo has given us no hint—the bewildered and brain-sick ingenuity of a German or even an Anglo-German commentator

would hardly be able to supply a suggestion—as to how this many-sided and many-coloured tragedy was to be worked out or wound up. Is it possible—we are driven to the question, and compelled to ask ourselves—that even his imagination found itself incapable of conceiving an adequate conclusion, of supplying an acceptable result from so many various and contending sources or springs of interest as he had set in motion here? Such an explanation is all but inadmissible: none other is conceivable. For the power, the skill, the dramatic invention and combination of the first act alone, can hardly be paralleled in any single act of any other play. Its great length is not more exceptional than its vast and marvellous variety of incident and impression: and yet, completed on the same giant scale, the play would apparently have been at least as long as *Cromwell*. With that gigantic work of the poet's earlier prime it has other points in common: for example, the original view and the strenuous grasp of historic problems, the rich and rolling eloquence of dialogue or monologue, the flashing and shifting interchanges of humour and wonder with terror and pity, the supple vitality of intrigue and the sublime exuberance of poetry.

The first title of the unfinished play was, we are told, *Le Comte Jean*: and Jean de Créqui will always be remembered as one of his creator's most noble and most memorable creatures. Chivalry, devotion, self-sacrifice, high-mindedness, the dominant qualities of the poet and his heroes, were not more sublimely represented in the preceding figures of the Duke of Ormond, of Saverny and the Marquis de Nangis, of Hernani and Don Ruy Gomez, of Saint-Vallier and Gennaro, of La Tisbe and Ruy Blas, than in the figure introduced in the first scene of this play under the disguise of a

mountebank. The real Guillot-Gorju, who helps him into 'the fantastic and ragged costume of Callot's strolling players,' is as bright and quaint a sketch of the born vagabond and honourable reprobate as young Jehan Frolo or the immortal Don César—concerning whom I may remark in passing that we might well have expected to receive in this volume the play long since announced by Théophile Gautier as existing in manuscript under the alluring title of *Une Aventure de Don César de Bazan*.

In the soliloquy which follows, the disguised hero of the play reveals his hatred of Mazarin as plainly as his perplexity with reference to the queen-mother and his anxiety with regard to a girl who is 'mixed up in this dark business.' Then, by a simple and rather daring use of dramatic opportunity or convenient invention, two noblemen enter and pass by, discussing the ruined castle of Plessis-les-Rois, and its communication with that of Compiègne by a subterranean way of which the queen and Mazarin alone have the keys :—

C'est là que se fit, grâce aux dispenses de Rome,

Le mariage obscur qui la lie à cet homme.

Comme c'est fort désert, ils y peuvent parler.

Aussi dit-on qu'ils vont parfois s'y quereller.

LE COMTE DE BUSSY. Juste. En ce temps-là donc se trouvait à Compiègne

Un seigneur dont je crains que le nom ne s'éteigne,  
Jean de Créqui.

LE DUC DE CHAULNE. Pardieu ! c'était un beau garçon !

LE COMTE DE BUSSY. D'autre part le Plessis avait pour garnison

Une douce beauté qui vivait fort recluse.

Jean savait les abords du manoir, et par ruse,

L'amour aidant, un soir, comme il n'était pas sot,

Il entra chez la dame et l'emporta d'assaut.

Or, plus tard il apprit, comment, je ne sais guère,

Que cette belle était la femme de son frère.

Je te donne les faits, arrange tout cela.

Le pire ou le meilleur, c'est qu'à neuf mois de là

Une fille naquit, fille justifiée

Et légale, la dame étant fort mariée.

Oui, mais le comte Jean. . . —C'est délicat, tu vois.

LE DUC DE CHAULNE. La fille a nom ?

LE COMTE DE BUSSY.

Alix de Ponthieu. Je la crois

Orpheline à présent.

That she is the heroine and her father the protagonist of the play it can hardly be necessary to explain : for the pathetic figure of the victim—the ' Man in the Iron Mask '—though designed with all the tenderness and skill, with all the sympathetic imagination and all the passionate fidelity, which even the greatest poet of our age could bring to bear upon such a subject, must inevitably remain passive—a patient rather than an agent. The two noblemen who have thus conveniently though not unnaturally explained or expounded what it was necessary for the audience or the readers of the play to understand proceed to make way for the man of whom they have been talking as doomed to immediate death if he should reappear. He reappears as a mountebank ; but after setting his attendant—the genuine mountebank's crier or herald—to beat the drum before their booth, appeals to this clown ; asks whether he is the sort of fellow to do a good deed some day or other. The answer and the following dialogue are beyond praise or description ; but we may venture to affirm that Rabelais and Molière might have united in applause of the magnificent effusion of this Tagus.

Rien n'est rare, manants, comme un bon astrologue.

Ben Jonson himself, in the plenitude of his powers, must have acknowledged in the writer of this speech a worthy if not a dangerous rival to the author of *The Alchemist*. But the scene in which the ' lieutenant de

police ' appears and disappears is worthier of the author of *Measure for Measure* than of the author of *Volpone* or even the author of *Tartufe*. The condensed and pointed dialogue, in which every reply is a brilliant epigram, and each epigram a suggestive revelation, bears throughout the mark of the writer's incomparable hand ; the strange and tragic scene which follows it could not have been more skilfully or more strikingly introduced.

The veiled woman whose identity is revealed by the furtive felicity of felonious chance—' un front bien fier chargé d'un joug bien vil '—is a figure no less pathetic than suggestive of future effect—if only the poem had been completed. An elaborate analysis of these successive scenes would require more time, as it would certainly demand more skill, than I can devote to so delicate and complicated a task. The scene in which the banished Créqui discovers himself to his fellow-nobles and fellow-subjects of ministerial tyranny is as strong in stage effect as it is magnificent in character and passion : but the scene in which he recognises his daughter in the girl who has devoted herself to an enterprise of such deadly peril as the rescue of the masked prisoner on whom she has set eyes but once brings to a climax of interest the close of an act as long as many plays, and richer than most in variety and intensity of impression.

At the opening of the second act we recognise the terrible gift of pathos which is peculiar to Victor Hugo. No Englishman, remembering Lord Tennyson's *Rizpah* and Mr. Browning's *Pompilia*, will deny that England has produced in our own day such examples of passionate and pathetic poetry as were never and will never be excelled ; but this example of Hugo's command over the springs of pity and terror is but one

among ' numbers numberless ' of proofs that no other poet was ever so possessed by the divine passion of indignant sympathy with innocent or unmerited suffering. The horror and the pity of this most piteous and most horrible story are intensified as well as transfigured by the nobility of treatment, the dignity of conception, the magnificence of style, which could make all things endurable if seen by the light of so great a mind and so noble a heart as Hugo's.

Le sommeil ne met pas mon âme en liberté.  
Dans mes songes jamais un ami ne me nomme.

Shakespeare, Webster, and Hugo are the only three poets in whose works we can reasonably hope to find anything like that ; or anything like the last six words of the following passage :—

Je dois te faire peur, n'est-ce pas ? J'étais seul  
Tout à l'heure, attendant l'heure où ton Dieu t'envoie,  
—Pardonne !—j'ai maudit ce Dieu qui fait ma joie !  
Il me semblait—vois-tu, je comptais les instants,—  
Que le rayon de jour mettait bien plus de temps  
Qu'à l'ordinaire encor pour gagner cette dalle.—  
Et puis ce masque noir . . . cette voûte infernale . . .—  
Quelqu'un qui m'aurait vu m'aurait pris pour un fou !  
Mon esprit s'en allait chercher je ne sais où  
Des rêves, des jardins, des champs pleins d'étincelles  
Où volaient des essaims dont j'enviais les ailes ;  
Je pleurais, j'écoutais si j'entendrais tes pas ;  
Et je ris maintenant !—Mais tu ne le vois pas.

The brilliant stagecraft of the scenes in which the prisoner's escape is effected and the treacherous gaoler is outwitted by the newly disguised Jean de Créqui would suffice for the reputation of the most consummate playwright that ever held an audience breathless by the perfection of his art : but the marvellous portrait of Mazarin in the truncated fragment of the third act

may hold its own beside any one of the poet's great historic or tragic studies. His breadth and depth of imaginative charity are here as conspicuous as in the immortal presentation of Torquemada. At first the minister who stands between a mother and a son, indifferent to her anguish of passionate reproach and confident in his obduracy of unfilial egotism, seems as repulsive a figure as even the heartless and dutiless young king; and the dramatic animation of the dialogue is so vivid and superb that it would seem impossible to modify the first effect, to change or attenuate the first impression of it: matters of state and of sentiment, of policy or of passion, were never wrought and welded into verse of more pathetic and energetic eloquence, of emotion more spontaneous and superb. And yet, when we listen to the monologue of the cold-hearted and implacable statesman, we recognise the utterance of a mightier and a more unselfish mind, a spirit of loftier aim and wider scope of insight and of foresight, than lives or works or speaks in any of the other figures revealed to us on this vast imaginary stage of historic and poetic action. The noble words in which Gautier describes the great monologue of Frederick Barbarossa in the play produced by Victor Hugo three years and six months after the attack of illness which proved fatal to the production of this one might well have served to describe the equally magnificent soliloquy of the high-thoughted and hard-hearted politician, pitiless out of pity for mankind, and relentless out of compassion for suffering. Here also we find 'un de ces beaux monologues politiques où M. Victor Hugo résume, dans une soixantaine de vers, la situation d'un pays, le caractère d'une époque. Il excelle à construire ces espèces de plans à vol d'oiseau, d'où l'on découvre, sous une forme distincte et réelle,



tous les événements d'un siècle. Du haut de sa pensée, la tête vous tourne, comme du sommet d'une flèche de cathédrale.' But even the phrase which follows—'toute cette politique transcendante, en vers d'une beauté cornélienne'—is inadequate to describe the soliloquy now before us : unless indeed there is to be found in the noblest work of Hugo's noblest predecessor on the tragic stage of France a passage of equal length and of equal weight which will bear comparison with the following in substance and in style :—

Rome ! . . . O cité que les ans font courber,  
 Qui parle sans comprendre et penche sans tomber,  
 Si bien qu'en la voyant la pensée indécise  
 De la tour de Babel flotte à la tour de Pise !  
 —Expliquons d'une part, et de l'autre étayons !  
 Hors l'Europe, la France a d'immenses rayons.  
 La France partout veille. Heureuse, forte, armée,  
 Elle éteint en passant toute guerre allumée.  
 Le sophi voudrait prendre avec le Kurdistan  
 Candahar au mogol, Babylone au sultan ;  
 Nous l'avons arrêté. Pour la vente et l'échange  
 Déjà nous remplaçons, du Tigre jusqu'au Gange,  
 Marchands arméniens et marchands esclavons.  
 Partout nous devenons les maîtres ; nous avons  
 Dans l'Inde des soldats, en Chine des jésuites.  
 Nos machines de guerre en tous lieux sont construites ;  
 Sûr moyen de régner sans lutter.—Je suis vieux,  
 Tout brisé par les ans, mes pires envieux ;  
 Je vois déjà, dans l'ombre où pas à pas je tombe,  
 Quelque chose d'ouvert qui ressemble à la tombe.  
 Eh bien, si l'heure sombre est tout proche en effet,  
 Quand Dieu dans mon cercueil me criera : Qu'as-tu fait ?  
 Je pourrai dire : O Dieu, l'onde a battu ma tête ;  
 Quand je suis arrivé, tout n'était que tempête ;  
 L'esprit des temps nouveaux, l'esprit du temps ancien,  
 Luttaient ; c'était terrible, et vous le savez bien ;  
 Louis onze a livré la première bataille ;  
 François premier, venu pour élargir l'entaille,  
 Est mort à l'œuvre avant que le géant tombât ;

Richelieu n'a pas vu la fin du grand combat ;  
Tous ces hommes, suivant leur loi haute et profonde,  
Ont fait la guerre.—Moi, je fais la paix du monde !

La paix du monde !—oh ! oui ! spectacle éblouissant !  
Dans ce travail sacré chaque jour avançant,  
Je vais. Le roi de France est mon outil sublime.  
J'ai fini maintenant et je suis sur la cime.  
Plus d'écueil ! plus d'obstacle !

'The rest is silence.' At this very point this great historic and tragic poem was shipwrecked on the obstacle of sudden illness, and sank to rise no more but as the fragment, the waif, the derelict, now stranded, with all its imperfect treasure and all its unaccomplished promise, before our defrauded and disappointed eyes. That it should be so is inexplicable, unaccountable, I had wellnigh added unpardonable. But on that subject I will insist no further. Nor can it now be necessary to dwell on the evidence here so amply supplied that no writer born in the same century can more properly be named in the same breath with Hugo than can any contemporary of either predecessor be named in the same breath with Dante or with Shakespeare. The strength and the sweetness, the power and the purity of his inspiration, are not higher above comparison or competition than the reach of his imaginative thought and the grasp of his dramatic intelligence.

Of the juvenile play fashioned with remarkable and precocious dexterity out of Scott's novel of *Kenilworth* it may suffice to say that its promotion to the place which it occupies is somewhat astonishing—in face of the fact that we find in the extract prefixed to it from the biography of its author these not insignificant words : 'Ma foi, dit M. Victor Hugo, je ne regarde pas cela comme une pièce de moi.' Its proper place would

have been in the later and enlarged edition of that biography, where it might have served to mark the first step made by the young author in advance of his very earliest attempts. It is interesting, curious, and even admirable as the work of a very young man ; but its appearance among the ripest and most important works—finished or unfinished—of Victor Hugo is not more incongruous than inexplicable.

V  
NOTES OF TRAVEL  
ALPS AND PYRENEES

1890

IT is a fact not less singular than significant that the volume containing Victor Hugo's personal reminiscences of men and events should have had more than twice the sale of any other among his posthumous works. Full of interest, personal and historical, as is the many-coloured record of *Choses Vues*, its crowning interest consists in the fact that the experiences recorded in that book are the experiences of the greatest writer born in the nineteenth century : the value of his other posthumous works consists in the fact that, if no other legacy had been bequeathed by him to time, they would have sufficed to prove him the greatest poet of an age which has been glorified by the advent of Tennyson, Browning, and Leconte de Lisle. The account of his excursions among the Alps at the age of thirty-seven, which occupies less than a quarter of the volume last issued, might perhaps have been conjectured, by a careful and thoughtful student of the man and his work, to belong to the same date as the second series of letters from the Rhine ; of which, as the prefatory note informs us, it is simply the sequel.

Most readers will probably agree that the most interesting and important episode in this epistolary journal is the one which has been extracted from a letter to the artist who had the honour of receiving the previous

letters from the Rhine. The six letters addressed to the wife of the writer are full to overflowing of evidence to the wonderfully swift, keen, and joyful observation of nature, the amazing quickness of notice, and the astonishing vivacity of recollection, which makes it hard for a duller eye and a slower brain to follow the mere transcript of his experiences and impressions. But the story of the mountebanks at Berne, a truncated and incoherent tragedy, could have been written as it is here written by no man that ever lived but the author of *Notre Dame de Paris*; and it is impossible to imagine—though he has vouchsafed no hint to that effect—that the creator of Esmeralda was not reminded of his creation by the sorrowful sight which he has registered for all time in that letter.

The description of Mount Pilatus at the opening of this volume would suffice to show that no such guide-book has ever been written, or ever will be, as Victor Hugo might have given us if he had undertaken the task of anticipating the labours commissioned by Messrs. Murray and Baedeker. But before we come to this nobly vivid and memorable bit of landscape we meet once again with an instance of the artist's ever ready and tender sympathy with all that is beautiful and with all that is sorrowful in the nature and the surroundings of man.

No reader could fail to recognise the hand that traced the lines which follow :—

Une madone est sur l'autel [of a chapel erected on the legendary site of the slaying of Gessler]; devant cette madone est ouvert un livre où les passants peuvent enregistrer leurs noms. Le dernier voyageur entré dans la chapelle y avait écrit ces deux lignes qui m'ont plus touché que toutes les déclarations de guerre aux tyrans dont le livre est rempli : ' Je prie humblement notre sainte mère de Dieu de daigner, par son

intercession, faire recouvrer un peu de vue à ma pauvre femme.' Je n'ai rien écrit sur le livre, pas même mon nom. Au-dessous de cette douce prière la page était blanche. Je l'ai laissée blanche.

To those who would compare—not in the vain and foolish hope to arrange the order of precedence or determine the rank of merit, but with the rational and scholarly desire to appreciate the special quality of each—the pictorial power of Hugo with that of such contemporaries as Tennyson and Ruskin, Browning and Carlyle, I would commend the study of such passages as the rapid sketch of the cloud on the summit of Mount Pilatus, and the yet more vivid study of the reflections in the lake of Lucerne. To me they seem to have more in common with the style of the great writer who last entered the Pantheon of England than with that of any other great man.

In the second letter, which deals with Berne and the Righi, there is nothing more striking—as there could be nothing more characteristic—than the picture of the splendid noonday landscape and the hideous idiot who was the only visible spectator of its glories. 'A quoi bon cette ironie dans une solitude? Dois-je croire que le paysage était destiné à lui crétin, et l'ironie à moi passant?' But the third letter is of special and incomparable interest. The spectacle seen by the writer when at breakfast—'reading while eating,' and reading the leaf which accident laid before him of the tragicomic bible of life—is now as immortal, though merely a record of actual fact, as though it had been a creation of the spectator's fancy; the glance, the touch, the sympathy of genius have made reality for once as real as fiction at its best. If any artist in letters could ever match or beat Jacques Callot on his own line—I do not say that I think this possible (or impossible)—

it must certainly be allowed that this master of grotesque and realistic tragedy was the painter of the terrible vagabond who is henceforward as sure of immortality as Clopin Trouillefou himself—even though Clopin be the creation of a poet, and his kinsman be only the creature of reality. But Callot, as far as I know his work, could not have drawn in any way comparable with Hugo's the beautiful and singular figure of the girl who was keeping watch beside this slumbering Caliban of the highways. I cannot venture to attempt a translation of the following lines :—

J'ai vu, sur cette place publique, une fille de seize ans, nette et jolie comme un caillou mouillé, baiser de minute en minute, avec une sorte d'admiration passionnée, les cheveux gras et les mains noires d'un affreux homme endormi qui ne sentait même pas ces douces caresses ; je l'ai vue épousseter avec ses doigts roses l'habit de saltimbanque dont ses gracieuses chiquenaudes faisaient sortir de petites nuées de poussière ; je l'ai vue chasser les mouches qui importunaient cet immonde dormeur, se pencher sur lui, écouter le bruit de son haleine et contempler tendrement ses bottes éculées ; et maintenant je suis tout prêt à applaudir l'écrivain quelconque qui voudra faire un roman intime intitulé : *Histoire mélancolique des amours d'une colombe et d'un pourceau*.

But the sordid and dismal little tragedy in which these singular actors played their unconscious parts in dumb show before the greatest of tragic dramatists whom the world has seen since Shakespeare is less impressive in its action than in its epilogue, when the fearful old gipsy who had betrayed her rival to the police turns round upon the biggest of the boys hooting and yelling at her, with her arm stretched out, and the voice of a screech-owl, crying, 'There's your gallows.' The whole grim, pathetic, grotesque and

lamentable story finds a fitting close in this quaint and ferocious touch of humour.

On the way to Aix-les-Bains Victor Hugo was apparently struck by a rather mediæval or Catholic fancy as to the hieroglyphic significance of letters—Latin letters, of course. The admirable French poet whom his countrymen seem to ignore, and whom Archbishop Trench long since made familiar and dear to all English lovers of mediæval Latin verse at its loveliest and quaintest, might have rejoiced to exchange fancies with his more illustrious countryman as to the significance of the alphabet: the fantastic elaboration of fancy, devout and inventive, is not more characteristic of Victor Hugo than of Adam de Saint-Victor.

The short letter on Geneva is as trenchant and curt in its sarcastic expression of disgust as Swift or Carlyle could have made it; whether just or unjust, rational or whimsical, a stranger to that city cannot judge. But I want words to say how grievously I am disappointed by this cruel and libellous description of a city where the sea and the sun would seem to have united their beauties and their forces in an attempt—I do not say a successful attempt—to rival the triumphant and incomparable charm of Venice: ‘Marseille est un amas de maisons sous un beau ciel, voilà tout’—a judgment which would hardly be just if pronounced against Leghorn. Can the writer of this sentence have ever walked up and down the Cannebière? The glory of colour, the splendour of sunshine, the fantastic charm of the stalls and shops opening on the rim of the radiant water, the wonderful multiplicity of many-coloured odds and ends basking and burning in the lazy but imperious light, the infinite interest and amusement excited and supplied by a stroll along that most enchanting of seaside streets, could only have



been done into words by Victor Hugo ; and all he has to say of it all is this. The only explanation I can conjecture is supplied by the remark of his old friend Nodier fourteen years before : ' Mon cher, vous êtes possédé par le démon Ogive.' And not a word about the island or the castle of If ! It is lamentable. However, the admirable contrast drawn between the waves of the Mediterranean and the real waves of the real sea is most happily accurate and appreciative :—

Ce n'étaient pas les larges lames de l'Océan qui vont devant elles et qui se déroulent royalement dans l'immensité ; c'étaient des houles courtes, brusques, furieuses. L'Océan est à son aise, il tourne autour du monde ; la Méditerranée est dans un vase et le vent la secoue, c'est ce qui lui donne cette vague haletante, brève et trapue. [What perfect choice of words, and what exquisite truth of eye !] Le flot se ramasse et lutte. Il a autant de colère que le flot de l'Océan et moins d'espace.

But the transcription of extracts from this book is a temptation to be eschewed. Otherwise the whole account of the double ravine of Ollioules would have to be cited in evidence of the matchless literary power which could make the mere description of a scene unknown to the reader as enthralling in interest as the most passionate scenes of a story or a play. Yet I suppose that to most readers there must be more interest in the record of a visit to scenes they know and love than in the record of a journey among scenes unfamiliar or undelightful to them ; at all events, I must avow that the second and larger division of this book is to me yet more fascinating than the first part. The style, if I may venture an opinion, is terser, keener, more trenchant and more vivid : the humour is riper and readier than before. Victor Hugo's dislike of what an eminent English poet of a later generation has

called 'the happy poplar-land' may have made him unjust to the capabilities of poplars for exceptional beauty of form and vivacity of expansion under exceptionally happy circumstances; but before I could say that 'I know a bank' on which they tower and glitter in such majestic freedom and variety of harmonious form as to rival any growth imaginable, I should certainly have agreed that

le peuplier est le seul arbre qui soit bête. . . . Il y a pour mon esprit je ne sais quel rapport intime, je ne sais quelle ineffable ressemblance, entre un paysage composé de peupliers et une tragédie écrite en vers alexandrins. Le peuplier est, comme l'alexandrin, une des formes classiques de l'ennui.

At Bordeaux the writer of the famous pamphlet headed *Guerre aux Démolisseurs* was moved to utter a protest and a warning as eloquent and as earnest as anything in his two essays on the same subject which were written respectively eighteen and eleven years earlier:—

Rien de plus funeste et de plus amoindrisant que les grandes démolitions. Qui démolit sa maison, démolit sa famille; qui démolit sa ville, démolit sa patrie; qui détruit sa demeure, détruit son nom. C'est le vieil honneur qui est dans ces vieilles pierres.

The whole of this letter from Bordeaux should be studied and appreciated by all who feel—and by all who need to learn—how close and how inextricable must be the connection of all serious and serviceable hope for the future with sincere and earnest reverence for the past. This, the keynote of Mazzini's political doctrine, was the watchword of Hugo's æsthetic doctrine long before he had been gradually and naturally

led to embrace the republican faith to which, like Shakespeare's Brutus, he devoted his life and his work 'only in a general honest thought, and common good to all.' 'Toutes ces mesures dédaignées,' he continues, 'sont des mesures illustres ; elles parlent, elles ont une voix ; elles attestent ce que vos pères ont fait.'

The description of the ruined cloister could only have been matched in verse by Shelley or in prose by Ruskin ; and for English readers this can hardly but suffice by way of comment or of commendation. In the next letter the journey from Bordeaux to Bayonne is rendered into words of such living simplicity and effect that we hear the sounds and smell the flowers of a summer day now dead these forty-seven years since. The tender childish recollections evoked on entering Bayonne have all the matchless and unfailing charm with which Hugo could always touch and invest, by a natural and sacred magic, the morning lights and shadows of the unforgotten and thenceforward imperishable past. But the charnel-house of St. Michael's at Bordeaux will now be for ever remembered by all students of his work as the subject of a realistic and tragic poem in prose which may be ranked among the greatest and most terrible triumphs of his imaginative and descriptive genius :—

I shall never forget what I saw then. The bellringer, silent and motionless, was standing upright in the middle of the crypt, leaning against a post imbedded in the flooring, and with his left hand he was lifting the lamp above his head. I looked round. A misty and scattered light vaguely lit up the crypt : I made out its ogee roof.

Suddenly, fixing my eyes on the wall, I saw that we were not alone.

Strange figures, standing upright with their backs to the wall, surrounded us on all sides. By the light of the lamp I

got a confused glimpse of them across the fog which fills low and gloomy vaults.

Imagine a circle of terrifying faces, in the centre of which I was standing. The blackish and naked bodies were sunken and lost in the darkness ; but I saw distinctly, starting out of the shadow, and leaning, as it were, somehow towards me, crowding one against another, a multitude of dismal or dreadful heads, which seemed to call on me with mouths wide open, but voiceless, and gazed on me from eyeless sockets.

What were these figures ? Statues, of course. I took the lamp from the ringer's hands and drew near. They were corpses.

The vampire mob of the Revolution had desecrated the popular cemetery of Bordeaux and the royal cemetery of Saint-Denis at the same infamous instant.

They tore the coffins from the soil ; they flung all that dust to the winds. When the pickaxe came near the foundations of the tower, they were surprised to find no more rotten biers or broken vertebræ, but complete bodies, dried and preserved by the clay which had covered them during so many years. This inspired the creation of a charnel-house museum. The idea was suitable to the period.

The little children of Montfaucon Street and the road to Bègles were playing at knuckle-down with the scattered fragments of the cemetery. They were taken out of their hands ; all that could be found were collected, and these bones were installed in the lower crypt of the bell-tower of St. Michael's. They made a pile seventeen feet deep, over which a flooring with a balustrade was adjusted. They crowned the whole with the corpses—so strangely intact—which had just been unearthed. There were seventy of them. They were set upright against the wall in the circular space reserved between the wall and the balustrade. This flooring it was that rang under my feet ; over these bone-heaps I was walking ; those corpses were looking at me.

But something of grimness was yet wanting to this

grim show. The plump, comfortable, red-cheeked bellringer began to play the part of showman :—

‘ Look at this fellow, sir ; he ’s number one. He ’s got all his teeth.—See how well preserved number two is ; and yet he ’s nearly four hundred years old.—As for number three, one would say he was alive and could hear us. No wonder ; he has only been sixty years dead. He ’s one of the youngest inhabitants. I know people in the town who knew him.’

If, as some thinkers or dreamers might venture to hope, those two great poets of the grave, John Webster and Victor Hugo, have now met in a world beyond the grave, they must surely have compared notes as to the impression left on such minds as theirs by such experiences as these.

The meditation which follows will remind all readers of one among the greatest poems of the greatest poet born in our century—*Pleurs dans la Nuit*. The deep and poignant sense of the apparent horror, the seeming dreadfulness and hopelessness of death, the fierce derision and the bitter mockery of its aspect—‘ *cette figure désespérée et redoutable* ’—is not more intensely expressed or more triumphantly subdued by the fervent contemplation of faith and the steadfast exaltation of hope in the poem which was given us thirty-four years ago than in the pages written eleven years before the date of its production and thirteen years before the date of its publication.

Two points in the letter from Biarritz were to me, on a first reading, the dominant points of interest. By far the more interesting of the two—and in all this magnificent volume there is nothing of more interest—is this :—

The second day I went to Biarritz. As I was walking at low tide in among the grots, looking for shells and terrifying

the crabs that ran off sideways and buried themselves in the sand, I heard a voice rising from behind a rock and singing the following stanza with something of a country accent, but not enough to prevent me from distinguishing the words :

‘ Gastibelza, l’homme à la carabine,  
Chantait ainsi :  
Quelqu’un a-t-il connu doña Sabine ?  
Quelqu’un d’ici ?  
Dansez, chantez, villageois ! la nuit gagne  
Le mont Falou.  
Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne  
Me rendra fou.’

It was a woman’s voice. I went round the rock. The singer was bathing. A handsome girl, who was swimming, clothed with a white shift and a short petticoat, in a little creek shut in by two reefs at the opening of a grot. Her clothes—a peasant girl’s—were lying on the sand at the inner end of the grot. When she saw me, she rose half out of the water and began singing her second stanza, and, seeing that I was standing motionless on the rock listening to her, she said to me, smiling, in a jargon of mixed French and Spanish :

‘ Señor estrangero, does your honour know this song ? ’  
‘ I think so,’ I answered. ‘ A little.’

That the song of songs, which is Hugo’s—the one lyric tragedy of passion which will always remain as incomparable and unapproachable as the supreme dramatic tragedy of passion, *Othello*—should have been the poem chosen by chance for the singer to overhear after such a fashion as this seems almost too delightful—too comfortable and satisfactory—to believe. The reader may remember, though he may be unable to count or to conjecture, how often he has chanted or shouted or otherwise declaimed it to himself, on horseback at full gallop or when swimming at his best, as a boy in holiday time ; how often the matchless music, the matchless ardour, the matchless pathos of it have

reduced his own ambition to a sort of rapturous and adoring despair ; and how, supposing him not to be a cur, the sense of its unequalled and unapproachable beauty has requickened his old delight in it with a new delight in the sense that he will always have this to rejoice in, to adore, and to recognise as something beyond reach of man ; that, whatever he may achieve, he can never feel himself bereft of a superior, a master, a poet beyond all thought of emulation ; that for any one born in this century who dreams of being a lyrist or a dramatist there is, always Victor Hugo, living or dead, to look up to and bow down to. And that our master should have had the pleasure of this experience—he did not condescend to express his pleasure, but to me his reticence seems hardly to conceal it—must surely be pleasant for all who honour him to remember.

We will not dwell on his shrinking anticipation that Biarritz might some day possibly become fashionable and be ruined ; but the story of his fly could only have been told by Thackeray with such quiet and serious humour. There is nothing funnier in *The Irish Sketch-Book* ; and there certainly is nothing so ingenious or so rascally recorded of an Irish conductor in that kindly and delightful volume. A penny to go, ten shillings to return, make up a tariff worthy of commemoration even by such a passenger as the one who found himself swindled on this occasion ; and Sterne could not have registered the experience with more delightful good-humour and more kindly realism. The fatality which befel everybody present at the first Bonaparte's imperial display or puppet-show would be hardly interesting at this date to any reader if he were not roused and shocked by the statement that ' the captain who had given the empress his hand,' to help her out of the water into which she had stumbled, was after-

wards condemned to death, and shot, for having done so. If this be true, it proves—and it is hard to understand how Victor Hugo should not have seen—that France was then at least, whether she is or is not now, so far behind all other barbarous nations as to be fit for alliance with none but Russia, Dahomey, or United Ireland.

The incident of the little old Spanish wagon drawn by oxen, which reminded Hugo of his childhood, will remind all readers of his unequalled power in evoking, his incomparable tact in expressing, those early recollections and associations which so few men of genius have been able to record gracefully or worthily of themselves. Walter Scott, Alexandre Dumas, and Victor Hugo could do this; but I hardly remember another who could. From Bayonne to St. Sebastian the most amusingly memorable record set down by Victor Hugo is the anecdote of a porter, Oyarbide by name. The letter from St. Sebastian leaves the reader bewildered and compassionate at the thought of so many fruitless revolutions, in which so much noble devotion and courage and chivalry were wasted; but the shining instance of royal gratitude on the part of Don Carlos and the noble incident of loyal comradeship on the part of General Elio serve excellently well to set off each other.

The letter describing the strange, enchanted, and enchanting old town of Pasages is so delightfully full of life and light and colour that no commentary can convey or can suggest a sense of its charm. The rival clamours of the boatwomen, which startled the writer from meditation on an insect and a flower; the singularly flattering disappointment of the girl whom Hugo paid for a task on which he did not employ her; the conversation with the admirer of the incomparable



rope-walk (Flaubert could not have recorded it with more calm severity and precision of touch) ; the dazzling and many-coloured prospect of a ' humble corner of earth and water which would be admired if it were in Switzerland and famous if it were in Italy, and is unknown because it is in Guipuzcoa,' compose an inimitable prologue to the extraordinary scene which follows. But I shall not attempt to indicate or to select any special passages or salient points in the two letters which give an account of this wonderful town of contrasts and its almost more wonderful surroundings. Let it suffice to say that they would suffice for the fame of a great writer.

The visit after sunset to the wasted village of Leso is told in words which recall and emulate Callot's study of the ravages of war. The grim church, with its ghastly past of sainted inquisitors and its ghastly present of scoffing children, is far more terrible to read of than the devil-haunted ruin on the mountain adjoining.

Pamplona, which the poet had so grandly celebrated fifteen years earlier, inspired on this occasion the longest and one of the most interesting of his letters. The noble, pathetic, and manly meditation on the mysterious sufferings of misused animals should remind us of a passage dealing with the same sorrowful and shameful subject in a poem (' Melancholia ') belonging to the third book of the *Contemplations*. The brilliant and grotesque description of the strange conveyance and its stranger conductors which introduces this discourse on the duty of pity is in its way as perfect as the sublimely characteristic and fantastic sketch of sunrise, touched and coloured by the dream or vision of a suggested sense in awakening nature of pain ineffable and pity inexpressible for the poor tormented and

terrified and bewildered beasts of burden or of draught—‘those forsaken and miserable animals who are her children as we are, and live nearer to her than we do.’

The summary of Spanish eccentricities and incongruities in which the poet has condensed his impressions of the country he was revisiting—‘*pays unique où l’incompatible se marie à tout moment, à tout bout de champ, à tout coin de rue*’—is one of the brightest and wittiest in illustration that he ever wrote. The gorge of Tolosa, on the other hand, gives occasion for some of the gravest and loftiest writing in this volume. The savage splendour of cliff and forest, the ‘broad sheets of live rock coming down from the highest summits, all sown with almost inexplicable great oaks’; the reapers of the size of ants ‘reaping their wheat in the abyss’; the hairbreadth escape of the coach with all its charge, preserved at the edge of the precipice by a decrepit old beggar with a stone kicked under the wheel; the city of Pamplona with its partially defaced cathedral, its quaint or noble incidents of street architecture, the cloister garden and the boudoir sacristy, the battle sculptured in marble on a tomb and the humble bier hard by it; the landscape transfigured by moonrise; the wrinkled and gleaming river that slid among the trees like a silver snake; the outbreak of life and music that brightens the sleepy old city from sunset to midnight; all this, and more, lives and vibrates on the written page as it might in the memory of a witness.

The little adventure recorded in the next letter is told in the illustrious traveller’s lightest and brightest style of narrative; and by the help of the plan marking out the various divisions of his night’s lodging we can almost see, and for that matter we can almost smell it: the sweet hay and the resinous flame, as well as ‘that

dull sugary smell exhaled from all Spanish bothies'; the huge fireplace with its dragon-like dogs, the one window, the one bed, the 'stable' with poultry and a calf in it just opposite, the 'cellar,' the 'arsenal,' the huge sloping block of granite with trusses of straw spread in front of it by way of accommodation for sleepers in the 'guest-chamber,' the gnome-like ape of a child, the streamlet running down a hollow bole sunk in the ground from one gap in the wall to another: a perfect and memorable picture in its grotesque and homely way.

To the letter from Cauterets the lovers of that sublimely lovely valley will naturally be tempted to turn on first opening this volume; and it will be with a shock of disappointed amazement that they will find no mention of its crowning glory. Of all great poets that ever lived, with the one possible and doubtful exception of Dante, Victor Hugo is the one who would have seemed most fit to describe and most capable of describing the lake of Gaube; and he, of all men and all tourists, was the one to turn back down the half-ascended valley, and leave it unvisited. The description of the mountain landscape before dawn is noble and lifelike, touched with earnest thought and coloured by living fancy; but I for one had hoped to find some notice of the flora and fauna which combine to give this high borderland its peculiar charm of brilliant and fervent life. The fiery exuberance of flowers among which the salamanders glide like creeping flames, radiant and vivid, up to the very skirt of the tragic little pine-wood at whose heart the fathomless little lake lies silent, with a dark dull gleam on it as of half-tarnished steel; the deliciously keen and exquisite shock of a first plunge under its tempting and threatening surface, more icy cold in spring than the sea in winter; the

ineffable and breathless purity of the clasping water in which it seems to savour of intrusive and profane daring that a swimmer should take his pleasure till warned back by fear of cramp when but half way across the length of it, and doubtful whether his stock of warmth would hold out for a return from the far edge opposite, to which no favouring magic can be expected to transport the clothes left behind him on the bank off which he dived ; the sport of catching and taming a salamander till it became the pleasantest as well as the quaintest of dumb four-footed friends ; the beauty of its purple-black coat of scaled armour inlaid with patches of dead-leaf gold, its shining eyes and its flashing tongue—these things, of which a humbler hand could write at greater length than this, would require such a hand as Hugo's to do them any sort of justice.

The account of Gavarnie, 'nature's Colosseum,' may be matched against any of this great artist's studies for terse and vigorous precision of imaginative outline. The brief notice of Luz gives a last touch of brightness to a book which then closes in gloom as deep as death. In the isle of Oléron, a ghastly and hardly accessible wilderness of salt marshes, with interludes of sterile meadow and unprofitable vineyard, manured with seaweed and yielding an oily and bitter wine ; with foul grey fog rising in heavy reek from the marshlands, a shore of mud, a desolate horizon, a lean and fever-stricken population, a prison for some hundreds of military convicts ; a heaviness like death, he tells us, fell upon the visitor.

Not a sound to seaward, not a sail, not a bird. At the bottom of the sky, to westward, appeared a huge round moon which seemed in those livid mists the reddened imprint of the moon with its gilding rubbed off. . . . Perhaps on another day, at another hour I should have had another impression.

But for me that evening everything was funereal and melancholy. It seemed to me that this island was a great coffin lying in the sea, and this moon the torch to light it.

Next day the writer of these words came by chance on the tidings—in a newspaper taken up in a coffee-house—that just five days earlier his eldest daughter and her six-months' husband had been drowned in a boating excursion on the Seine.

It was not till three years later that the first was written of those matchless poems of mourning which keep fresh for ever the record of his crowning sorrow.

VI  
NOTES OF TRAVEL  
FRANCE AND BELGIUM

1892

AT the opening of the noble historic drama which secured at once and for ever an unique place among the names of his contemporaries for the name of Sir Henry Taylor, there is a fine passage which seems not more descriptive of the character already displayed and the career already accomplished than prophetic of the career and the character to be for half a century longer even more wonderfully and triumphantly accomplished and displayed by the greatest and the most illustrious of them all.

He was a man of that unsleeping spirit,  
He seemed to live by miracle.

The relaxations accorded by Victor Hugo to his genius in its more inactive hours might have sufficed for the most strenuous exercise, the most ardent application of another man's. Each fresh instalment of his travelling notes and correspondence during any fresh excursion at home or abroad gives new, delightful, and superfluous evidence of this. The tender and cordial simplicity of affection which overflows on every page of the letters addressed to his wife is equally devoid of ostentation and of reserve. But even in its homeliest and most familiar moments we must recognise the personality, the unity, the harmony of his intelligence.

What has been said of Lamb's and of Landor's very briefest and slightest notes may as truthfully be said of Hugo's; that obviously and unquestionably no other man could have written them, and that they can all with equal ease be distinguished from any other man's. No three good styles could well be more unlike, as no three noble natures could well have shown more points of difference to relieve their fundamental and radical unity of kinship in the crowning qualities of integrity, loyalty, and affection. The soft radiance and beneficence of Lamb's incomparable and inexhaustible humour, the potent and trenchant purity of Landor's matchless steel, are not more unmistakable in every touch and thrust than the lambent fire and the penetrative light of Victor Hugo's impassioned and indefatigable inspirations.

The second instalment posthumously published of his travelling notes consists of letters and journals bearing date from the thirty-third to the thirty-eighth year of his life. At the very outset we recognise the fiery devotion to all that was beautiful, noble, venerable in the past, which informs as with a passion of reverence every line ever written on the many-sided subject of its monuments by the great crusader against modern barbarism whose crowning appeal to his countrymen on behalf of their ravaged and desecrated inheritance was delivered in the famous pamphlet, *Guerre aux Démolisseurs!* The ruined wonders of Karnac gave him 'almost a moment of despair.' The wreck of 'an unique thing which is no more' wrung from his indignation a cry of natural and noble anguish. This we might have expected: the gift of comic improvisation in 'rime doggerel' so joyously and brilliantly displayed is only not quite a new revelation of Hugo's universal power of touch upon the lowest as the highest

keys, the lightest as the deepest chords of song. Burns himself was no greater master of spontaneous grotesque and the vivid stroke of lyric epigram. The horrible inn of *la Hure* at Laon is immortal as any kirk or hostelry ever consecrated or desecrated by the earlier poet's commemoration : and the odelet (as Banville might have called it) to Yvetot is even beyond such comparison for its play of rhythmic laughter and musical disgust—a bright angry little fountain of sunny mockery spurting up and splashing the unlovely and unlucky little town

Où le poing d'un bélière  
Croit casser une vitre  
Et crève un vieux papier :  
Où l'on a pour saladé  
Ce qu'un lapin malade  
Laisse dans son clapier.

Turn a leaf backwards or forwards, and you come upon some such living and deathless landscape or study of the sea as that of the Tréport moonrise over the rising tide.

Few of the innumerable passages which bear eloquent and passionate record of the poet's devotion to the glories of sacred architecture are nobler or more luminous than his reflections on the cathedral of Chartres :

Autant de détails que dans une forêt, autant de tranquillité et de grandeur. Cet art-là est vraiment fils de la nature. Infini comme elle dans le grand et dans le petit. Microscopique et gigantesque.

O pauvres architectes de nos jours qui ont l'art de faire de si petits édifices avec de si grands amas de pierre, qu'ils viennent donc étudier ceci ! qu'ils viennent apprendre, ces bâtisseurs de grandes murailles nues, comment le simple contient le multiple sans en être troublé, comment le petit détail agrandit le grand ensemble. Ce sont véritablement de malheureux artistes qui



ont perdu le sens de leur art, et qui ôteraient les feuilles aux chênes comme les arabesques aux cathédrales.

If no beauty was too delicate, no grace too minute for reproduction by great artists of old and admiration by the greatest of our own age, neither was any detail too mean that had about it any quaint relief or original outline for notice at his hand, and preservation by some touch worthy now of Callot's and now of Hogarth's. Here, in one word, is the physiognomy of a mannish old hag set down for ever :—

Ernée est une affreuse petite ville bête et plate où il y a une vieille hideuse qui tient une horrible auberge.

The fine and keen sense which registered in its memory the 'wild-beast smell' of a hemlock-field must have suffered martyrdom in a country where—as he affirms of Brittany—the only cleanly inhabitants are the pigs : and even this exception is cancelled, this compliment is withdrawn, in the very next letter : which gives us a glimpse of a cottage gilded with sunshine, smoking gaily through clusters of ivy and roses — 'un affreux bouge breton où les cochons couchent pêle-mêle avec les bretons. Il faut avouer que les cochons sont bien sales.' He should have remembered that they were of Celtic breed.

Some of his most thankful and devoted students have sometimes been somewhat inclined to grudge if not to cavil at the occasional enthusiasm professed or confessed by Victor Hugo for the mechanical triumphs of material progress—for the steamship, for the railway, for the crafts that plague mankind. They will take some little or it may be no little comfort from such a passage as this which places on record his crowning disgust at the crowning degradation and deformation of St. Michael's Mount in Brittany :—

Pour couronner le tout, au faite de la pyramide, à la place où resplendissait la statue colossale dorée de l'archange on voit se tourmenter quatre bâtons noirs. C'est le télégraphe. Là où s'était posée une pensée du ciel, le misérable tortillement des affaires de ce monde. C'est triste.

The like disgust was aroused at Avranches by the reappearance of the same incomparably disgusting object. Neither Mr. Ruskin nor Mr. Arnold could have touched a happier note of hatred and contempt for it :—

Il y a une magnifique vue, mais il n'y a que cela. Autrefois il y avait trois clochers, maintenant il y a trois télégraphes qui se content réciproquement leurs commérages. Or, les bavardages d'un télégraphe sont d'un médiocre effet dans le paysage.

Next minute we get—and that again in one word—a perfect impression of a complete and indivisible prospect :—

J'ai oublié les contorsions du télégraphe au-dessus de ma tête en regardant l'admirable horizon qui entoure le Mont-Saint-Michel de sa circonférence où la mer se soude à la verdure et la verdure aux grèves.

A fuller if not an even finer example of rapid perception and graphic transcription of natural beauty is this contrast between the roofs of inland and of seaside cottages :—

C'est une rencontre bien jolie et bien gracieuse qu'une chaumière au bord du chemin. De ces quelques bottes de paille dont les paysans croient faire un toit, la nature fait un jardin. A peine le vilain a-t-il fini son œuvre triviale que le printemps s'en empare, souffle dessus, y mêle mille graines qu'il a dans son haleine, et en moins d'un mois le toit végète, vit et fleurit. S'il est de paille, comme dans l'intérieur des terres, ce sont de belles végétations jaunes, vertes, rouges,

admirablement mêlées pour l'œil. Si c'est au bord de la mer et si le chaume est fait d'ajoncs, comme auprès de Saint-Malo, par exemple, ce sont de magnifiques mousses roses, robustes comme des goëmons, qui caparaçonnent la cabane. Si bien qu'il faut vraiment très peu de temps et un rayon de soleil ou un souffle d'air pour que le misérable gueux ait sur sa tête des jardins suspendus comme Sémiramis.

The fusion of pity and horror into a fiery and burning charity which was yet to find its most consummate utterance in *Les Misérables* is here also manifest in the account of two hapless creatures seen and pitied in passing. The noble seaside and sunset view so nobly and vividly rendered in a few strong touches serves painfully well as setting or background for the more lamentable and terrible of the two sorrowful sights.

The notes of a later tour in Belgium are fuller if not more interesting than those of three previous years on Brittany and Normandy. The third is a delightful letter, describing with equal grace of touch the charm of the quaintest of town belfries at Douai and the miraculous dullness and ugliness of Cambrai. A more fascinating miracle was the wonderfully carven and wonderfully described pulpit of Sainte-Gudule at Brussels; and the view from the steeple is given as only one man's eye could have seen and only one man's hand could have recorded it.

At Antwerp the strong imagination of Victor Hugo fell in love—such tricks hath strong imagination—with a steam-engine; the 'prodigious beast' that 'you hear moaning in its whirlwind of flame and smoke like a harassed horse'; but not so deeply in love as to forbid his admission that

the iron horse must not be seen; if you see it, all the poetry is gone. Four hundred years since, if those who invented gunpowder had invented steam, as they well might have done, the

iron horse would have been otherwise fashioned and otherwise caparisoned ; the iron horse would have been something alive like a horse and awful like a statue. What a magnificent Chimæra would our fathers have made with what we call the boiler ! Can you imagine that ? Of this boiler they would have made a scaly and monstrous belly, an enormous carapace ; of the chimney tube a smoking horn or a long neck with its gullet full of live embers ; and they would have hidden the wheels under immense fins or great falling wings : the carriages too would have had a hundred fantastic forms, and at evening one would have seen passing near towns sometimes a colossal gargoyle with outspread wings, sometimes a dragon vomiting fire, sometimes an elephant with its trunk raised, panting and roaring ; wild, ardent, reeking, terrible, dragging after them as their prey a hundred other monsters enchained, and crossing the plains with the speed, the noise, and the likeness of a thunderbolt. It would have been great.

But we are a set of worthy tradesmen, very stupid and very proud of our stupidity. We understand neither nature nor art, nor intelligence, nor fancy, nor beauty, and what we do not understand we declare, from the height of our pigmyhood, to be useless. Well and good ; where our ancestors would have seen life, we see matter. There is a splendid subject for a sculptor in a steam-engine : the tenders were an admirable opportunity for reviving the noble art of metal treated in relief. What does that signify to our coal-heavers ? Their machine, such as it is, is even now far above the reach of their lumbering admiration. As for me, when I am given Watt stark naked, I should prefer him dressed by Benvenuto Cellini.

It is again a great relief to find so passionate a French patriot as the greatest of all Frenchmen so capable of such bitter contempt for the democratic theatricals of Gallican geese and gooseherds as was excited in the mind of Victor Hugo at sight of a dried poplar in a village marketplace which was announced to him as ' a tree of the constitution.' This mock tree of sham liberty, ' a wretched dry pole which has to be propped

up against the wind,' was in his eyes 'a faithful symbol of so many modern constitutions which belong neither to the past nor to the future nor to the climate' of the soil in which the sapless things have been set up to rot.

Nor is it less comfortable to discover that the most illustrious enemy of capital punishment by law could on occasion give just and devout thanks to Heaven for the infliction of capital punishment by murder on a millionaire who had purchased and demolished a beautiful old cloister, who had sold it 'stone by stone, bit by bit, lead, iron, wood, and brick'; who had 'devastated, ruined, dismantled, robbed, and despoiled' the magnificent abbey of St. Bavon. It does the heart good to read and to repeat internally this imprecation of thanksgiving.

In the same letter there is a most graceful and characteristic parallel between art and nature, a cathedral and a wood, which must remind all worthy readers of an exquisite poem in the *Chansons des Rues et des Bois*.

The noble study of storm at Ostend is worthy of its place in the long and majestic gallery of this great painter's landscapes. The reader sees and hears the falling whirls of gusty rain, the sobs of the sinking and reviving wind, the gulf of inky blackness in front and underfoot and overhead, the fearful noise coming out of it, the sea of flame that once and again blazed forth in it, outlining sharply with its foam of living fire all the fang-like indentations of a dark and jagged seaboard, the thunder crashing down from cloud to cloud like a house-beam fallen from the rooftree of the sky down the thousand stories of a gigantic framework.

The tender and delicate study of sea and land taken during a walk of twenty-one miles across the sands to Dunkirk may be set against this storm-piece by way of relief. Its perfect rendering of a peculiar effect is

as singularly exquisite as is that effect itself in nature : but if Hugo could translate the sunlight and the sea, I do not presume it possible to translate his version of the idyl improvised by their collaboration :—

La mer était parfaitement gaie et calme, et l'écume des vagues, blanche et pailletée au soleil, faisait tout le long du rivage comme une frange de vermicelles et de chicorées cent fois plus délicatement sculptés que tous les plafonds maniérés du dix-huitième siècle. Quand la mer veut faire du rococo, elle y excelle. Les confiseries Pompadour lui ont pillé ses coquillages.

All worshippers of what is most adorable on this earth will appreciate the following pious utterance of a fellow-believer whose name heads the list of the apostles of their faith, the canonical roll of the hierarchs of their church :—

C'est un des côtés charmants du voyage dans cette saison, à la porte de chaque chaumière il y a un enfant. Un enfant debout, couché, accroupi, endimanché, tout nu, lavé ou barbouillé, pétrissant la terre, pataugeant dans la mare, quelquefois riant, quelquefois pleurant, toujours exquis. Je songe parfois avec tristesse que toutes ces délicieuses petites créatures feront un jour d'assez laids paysans. Cela tient à ce que c'est Dieu qui les commence et l'homme qui les achève.

L'autre jour, c'était charmant. Figure-toi cela, chère amie. Il y avait, sur le seuil d'une masure, un petit qui tenait ses deux sabots dans ses deux mains, et me regardait passer avec de beaux grands yeux étonnés. Tout à côté il y en avait une autre, une petite fille grande comme Dédé, qui portait dans ses bras un gros garçon de dix-huit mois, lequel serrait dans les siens une poupée. Trois étages. En tout, trente-deux pouces de haut.

And there they are for ever ; immortal as nature could not make them ; never to grow older or bigger,

or less—to borrow an apt epithet from Sir Philip Sidney—less kissworthy.

Among many that might be chosen I select as a faultless and complete example of style this vignette of a seaside hamlet :—

Étaples n'est qu'un village, mais un village comme je les cherche, une colonie de pêcheurs installée dans un des plus gracieux petits golfes de la Manche. La marée était basse quand j'y suis arrivé ; toutes les barques étaient échouées au loin sur le sable, noires et luisantes comme des coquilles de moules. J'en ai dessiné quelques-unes, tout en me promenant sur la grève. De temps en temps je rencontrais, sur les seuils des cabanes, de graves figures de marins qui vous saluent noblement. La mer brillait au milieu du golfe, éclatante et déchiquetée, comme un lambeau de drap d'argent. Les hauteurs qui bornent l'horizon au midi ont une forme magnifique et calme. Quelques grands nuages y rôdaient lentement. C'était un spectacle tranquille et grand.

Le soir, il semble que les nuages vont se coucher. Ils s'aplatissent, ils s'allongent, ils s'étendent comme pour dormir.

Le jour ils s'enflent, se dilatent et se gonflent au soleil comme des édredons devant le feu. En général, je les aime mieux le soir. Ils dessinent alors dans l'air des baies et des promontoires qui font du ciel un immense miroir où la mer se réfléchirait avec ses côtes sombres et découpées.

At Montreuil-sur-Mer, a place not yet made famous and wellnigh sacred by the memories of Jean Valjean and Fantine, the future author of *Les Misérables* mused only on those aspects and developments of inanimate and animated nature through plant and stone and beast which were to inspire so much of his subtlest and sublimest poetry, and here gave birth and form to a simple and noble rapture of meditation. Next moment we come upon a curious example of the quality known as 'jingoism,' in the gutter slang of

those reactionary disunionists whose version of a vulgar song would seem to run as follows :—

We don't want to fight, but if you, by jingo ! do,  
Pray take our money, ships, and men—but please don't kick us too.

The blindest and spitefullest childishness of poor old Citizen Chauvin is respectable compared to the grovelling abjection of Anglo-Saxon Anglophobia. Even among the basest of French reactionaries the French might be justified in boasting that such naked and shameless disloyalty would be scouted and scourged back into its sewer-holes. It is a less ignoble perversity or obliquity of prepossession which sees in the *victory of Waterloo* 'the triumph of mediocrity over genius.' At this we may smile : our gorge rises at the other.

The humorous little word of unapologetic apology—of apology in the original sense of vindication—with which Victor Hugo dismisses the intrusive and irritating subject is delightful in its frank and manly good-nature of tone. 'Je n'ignore pas que tout ce que j'écris ici pourrait se traduire en un couplet de facture' [I must take leave to add, with all deference, that it most certainly might], 'mais cela m'est égal. Albertus' [Gautier, I presume, the young author of the splendid youthful poem so entitled] 'sait bien que j'ai tout un grand côté bête et patriote'—for which no loyal and patriotic Englishman will love or honour him one jot or tittle the less.

There is a superb and all but Rabelaisian description of the huge farmyard in a little hamlet where the stage-coaches used still, in those days, to cross and halt :—

Sans songer à la table d'hôte, ce monstre aux dents de requin, toutes ces omelettes, toutes ces côtelettes, tous ces



jambons, tous ces salmis, grouillent, piaillent, bêlent, chantent, roucoulent, grognent, volent, marchent, nagent, et flânent parmi des Alpes de fumier où les mares font des lacs.

Here follows a noble description of a noble sow :—

Elle est monstrueuse, elle est gaie, grasse, velue, rose et blonde. Il faut être un fier cochon pour faire la cour à une pareille créature.

In the next letter there is an admirably faithful description of the effect seen from a cliff where the landscape at its highest seems overtopped by the outer sea. A few more vivid sketches of the seaboard towns and villages, cliffs and downs, bring the epistolary journal of 1837 to a graceful close with the picture of a vagrant family which might have been taken by another and younger great writer whose genius was then at sunrise—Dickens.

The notes of a two years' later excursion in the south of France and Burgundy belong, it seems, to the same series from which the author's famous book on the Rhine was long since compiled for publication, and of which the first posthumous volume of travelling notes gave another and not yet a final instalment. The appropriate aspect of Avignon under an autumnal sunset is briefly and brightly translated into words, with the natural commentary on its historical and spiritual significance.

All lovers of his second masterpiece in prose will turn with interest deeper than any mere eagerness of curiosity to the record of Victor Hugo's visit to the galleys at Toulon. In the next letter they will be refreshed by a magnificent mountain and seaside landscape of precipice and forest bathed and steeped in magical flying glories of storm and sunrise ; in the next by a noble rapid sketch of the Rhone in flood.

The last section of this beautiful and precious volume is consecrated to the cathedral of Sens. Full of learning, eloquence, personal and historical interest, it closes with an elegiac epitaph on the grave of a little unknown child. The four lovely lines have appeared before in an earlier volume of these priceless and deathless posthumous works : they could nowhere be more perfectly in place, more happily in character, than here.

## VII

### DIEU

1891

TOWARDS the close of the year 1855 two poems by Victor Hugo were announced for publication : an engagement never to be fully redeemed, and never to be redeemed at all during the lifetime of their author. Upwards of thirty years more were reserved for the various and incessant labours of his illustrious life, for the manifold and marvellous expansion of his incomparable genius ; but the two poems advertised as then in preparation were never to appear in full. On the reverse leaf of the plain paper covering in which *Les Contemplations* then came forth for the delight and wonder of all ages of the world, till thought and passion, sympathy and emotion, and poetry and nature shall be no more, the two great and strange titles, *Dieu* and *La Fin de Satan*, gave promise of future work on the same lines as the sixth book of that immortal collection or selection of lyric and elegiac, meditative and prophetic poetry. And now, upwards of thirty-six years later, we receive all that we ever shall receive of the first-named and more ambitious poem. Fragments of its vast original design may possibly be recognised, may certainly be surmised, as lying imbedded or incorporate in other works since completed and issued in the designer's lifetime ; in the second series, for instance, of *La Légende des Siècles*, and especially in the historic and philosophic poem called *Religions et*

*Religion.* There as here the intellect of a sovereign thinker was rather displayed than disguised by the genius of a supreme poet. We must not, of course, overlook or forget a fact so familiar to the lowest intelligence which finds itself capable of articulate expression as is this: that no great poet can be really a great thinker; that the ideal Gomorrah of Plato was the creation of a deeper intelligence, a loftier intuition, than the ideal Areopagus of Æschylus; that Aristophanes of Athens, in his campaign against Socrates of Sodom, succeeded only in displaying the spiritual inferiority of a conservative patriot to a progressive idealist. A later and no less obvious example of intellectual inferiority—of petty, trivial, fantastic tenuity of thought, contrasted with superb, virile, trenchant energy of intelligence—must be familiar to all Englishmen who have ever compared Shakespeare's plays with Bacon's essays: the platitudes, for instance, of the playwright's Hamlet with the profundities of the Chancellor's exposition 'of Nature in Men.'

With Plato and Bacon we must not then compare—we should not, if desirous to do so, be permitted to compare—such thoughtless thinkers, such brainless songsters, as Sophocles or Shakespeare, Pindar or Victor Hugo. We must know that we must be wrong if we fancy that we find in such a volume as that now before us more grasp of thought, more solidity of reason, more fixity of faith, than in such theological treatises as teach us the grammar of assent without belief. It must suffice us to examine, in a spirit of charitable tolerance and of consideration less contemptuous than compassionate, what manner of message, if any, it may pretend or attempt to convey.

One point, however, it would be difficult for the most scornful professor of theology or atheology to

dispute ; that the most ardent optimist and spiritualist of his age could become, when it pleased him to speak dramatically, to cast his imagination, as it were, into the mould of another man's mind, and assume the mask or the raiment of another man's intelligence, an incomparable exponent of pessimism and materialism. The philosopher of Force and Matter, the poet of Dreadful Night, found no such utterance for the faith which was in them as Hugo has bestowed upon the bat and the owl of his superhuman vision :—

Le moindre grain de sable est un globe qui roule  
 Trainant comme la terre une lugubre foule  
 Qui s'abhorre, et s'acharne, et s'exècre, et sans fin  
 Se dévore ; la haine est au fond de la faim.  
 La sphère imperceptible à la grande est pareille ;  
 Et le songeur entend, quand il penche l'oreille,  
 Une rage tigresse et des cris léonins  
 Rugir profondément dans ces univers nains.

In no other poem of Hugo's are there to be found so many and such striking coincidences of thought and expression with the contemporary work of his greatest English contemporary. Compare with this the famous passage in *Maud*—

For nature is one with rapine.

Again and again the English reader will be reminded of Tennyson as vividly and as directly as here. It is hardly necessary to transcribe any of the parallel passages which no probable reader can be supposed not to know by heart :—

Tout ce que vous voyez est larve ; tout vous leurre,  
 Et tout rapidement fond dans l'ombre ; car tout  
 Tremble dans le mystère immense et se dissout ;  
 La nuit reprend le spectre ainsi que l'eau la neige.  
 La voix s'éteint avant d'avoir crié : Que sais-je ?

. . . . .

O toi qui vas ! l'esprit, le vent, la feuille morte,  
 Le silence, le bruit, cette aile qui t'emporte,  
 Le jour que tu crois voir par moments, ce qui luit,  
 Ce qui tremble, le ciel, l'être, tout est la nuit !

To this cry of triumphant despair it would be difficult to find an echo in the work of the English poet ; but all serious lovers of poetry will be reminded of one of the noblest passages in English verse on reading these posthumous lines of the greatest European poet since the days of Dante :—

Vanité !

Tu crois qu'en te créant Dieu t'a mis de côté,  
 Que ton berceau contient toutes les origines,  
 Et que tout se condense en toi ; tu t'imagines  
 Qu'à mesure que tout naissait et surgissait  
 L'Éternel t'en donnait quelque chose ; et que c'est  
 Sur ton crâne que Dieu pensif traça l'épure  
 De ce monde qu'emplit son auréole pure.  
 Tu dis : J'ai la raison, la vertu, la beauté.  
 Tu dis : Dieu fut très las pour m'avoir inventé,  
 Et tu crois l'égaliser chaque fois que tu bouges.

' He now is first, but is he the last ? is he not too base ? ' That bitter and terrible question will ring at once in the ears of the English reader ; who can hardly fail to remember the magnificent music of the six lines which close with it as even greater and more memorable than the ironic harmony, the dramatic resonance, of these.

But it is rather of Blake than of Tennyson that an English reader will be usually reminded by the passionate and apocalyptic utterance of horror and of hope, of anguish and of faith, which rings and thrills through every line of this incomplete yet perfect poem. The intensity of pity and of wonder, hardly harmonised or scarcely subdued by the intensity of hope and faith, which vibrates in the lyric aspiration and meditation of Blake, finds a fuller, a clearer, but not a deeper or a purer expression in the matchless verse of Hugo. The

adorable poem called *Auguries of Innocence*—a series of such divine epigrams as angels might be imagined to dictate, by way of a lesson for repetition, to little children—has here, for the first time, an echo or a parallel. The wrongs and sufferings of our fellow-animals had been nobly and touchingly denounced and lamented by such less inspired voices as those of Cowper and of Burns, before they struck home to the heart of the great man who was only not a great poet in the formal and executive sense because he was always altogether a child at heart, and a vagrant denizen on earth of the kingdom of heaven ; but the pleading or the appeal of Burns as of Cowper was merely the expression of material compassion and compassionate indignation ; to Blake as to Hugo these sufferings and these wrongs were the ciphers or the figures of a problem insoluble except by faith, and unendurable to contemplate unless by the eyes of faith. Not Blake himself is more extravagant, excessive, outrageous to the instincts or the inductions of common sense and practical reason—more preposterous, more puerile, more Manichean—than the greatest and most inspired writer of our own day. Till now it would have been difficult to find a parallel for the divine absurdity, the insane and ineffable wisdom, of such sayings as these :—

A robin-redbreast in a cage  
 Puts all Heaven in a rage.  
 A gamecock clipped and armed for fight  
 Doth the rising sun affright.  
 A horse misused upon the road  
 Calls to Heaven for human blood.  
 Each outcry of the hunted hare  
 A fibre from the brain doth tear.  
 A skylark wounded on the wing  
 Doth make a cherub cease to sing.

But the passionate pity, the fiery tenderness and the sensitive intensity of faith, with which these couplets are informed and imbued as with life and meaning beyond the mere nakedness of words, are clothed by the genius of Hugo with yet fuller and loftier and more superb expression. And assuredly the vehemence of belief—the wilfulness, the positiveness, the audacity of confidence—is unmistakably identical in its constant and insistent ardour of affirmation. No two poets of the prophetic or evangelic order can ever have had more utterly unlike beginnings and surroundings than the London hosier's son and the child of the camp of the French army in Spain : and yet there is no third—not even Shelley, and not even Coleridge—whose vision was as the vision of these ; right or wrong, mad or sane, wise or foolish. Hugo's, as we know, was to Sainte-Beuve a stumbling-block, and to Mérimée foolishness ; Blake's, to all but two or three of his contemporaries—Wordsworth, to be sure, being one of the two or three—was sheer lunacy. For less acute and intelligent readers than the Sainte-Beuves and Mérimées and Matthew Arnolds it may be interesting to compare the couplets above cited with the passage of which these few lines may be taken as a sample :—

Pourquoi le héron gris, qui s'enfuit dans les brumes,  
Sent-il le noir faucon fouiller du bec ses plumes ?  
Pourquoi, troussant ta manche et tachant tes habits,  
Plonges-tu les couteaux aux gorges des brebis ?

Cours au désert, la vie est-elle plus joyeuse ?  
Que d'effrayants combats dans le creux d'une yeuse  
Entre la guêpe tigre et l'abeille du miel !  
Va-t'en aux lieux profonds, aux rocs voisins du ciel,  
Aux caves des souris, aux ravins à panthères ;  
Regarde ce bloc d'ombre et ce tas de mystères ;  
Fouille l'air, l'onde, l'herbe ; écoute l'affreux bruit  
Des broussailles, le cri des Alpes dans la nuit,



Le hurlement sans nom des jungles tropicales ;  
Quelle vaste douleur !

It seems unseemly and irreverent to transcribe such lines and to break off in the middle ; but the breach must be made somewhere. And wherever the eye may light on reopening the book, the hand is impelled to transcribe again such samples of its contents as this :—

L'homme n'a qu'à pleurer pour retrouver son père.  
Le malheur lui dit : Crois. La mort lui crie : Espère !  
Qu'il se repente, il tient la clef d'un sort meilleur.  
Dieu lui remplace, après l'épreuve et la douleur,  
Le paradis des fleurs par l'Éden des étoiles.  
Ève, à ta nudité Marie offre ses voiles :  
L'ange au glaive de feu rappelle Adam proscrit ;  
L'âme arrive portant la croix de Jésus-Christ ;  
L'éternel près de lui fait asseoir l'immortelle.

Aigle, la sainteté de l'âme humaine est telle  
Qu'au fond du ciel suprême où la clarté sourit,  
Où le Père et le Fils se mêlent dans l'Esprit,  
Il semble que l'azur égalise et confonde  
Jésus, l'âme de l'homme, et Dieu, l'âme du monde !

The adoring reverence of Hugo for the sacred name which is used here to express the ideal of divine or glorified humanity stands out singularly in contrast with the apparent aversion excited by its association with creeds and churches in the mind of such a contemporary student and fellow-republican as Michelet. But it is always more interesting, as it is always more profitable, to find instances of likeness than to find instances of contrast to the work of a poet or the speculation of a thinker : and in the following couplet—one of the most perfect and magnificent in all the world of verse—we hear again an unconscious echo of the spirit and indeed the very voice of William Blake :—

L'oubli que ferait Dieu du dernier et du moindre  
Suffirait pour ôter au jour le droit de poindre.

But of course it is seldom that we find anything here which could have been written by any hand save one. The full and fiery torrent of Crashaw's sometimes turbid and morbid verse poured out in honour of a great Catholic saint has in it no pearl of praise that can be set against the single line which closes the following magnificent and transcendent passage:—

Oh ! vous l'avez cherché sans l'entrevoir, sibylles,  
Ce Dieu mystérieux des azurs immobiles !  
Filles des visions, toi, sous l'arche d'un pont,  
Manto ; toi, guettant l'œuf que la chouette pond,  
Albunée, et brûlant une torche de cire ;  
Toi, celle de Phrygie, épouvante d'Ancyre,  
Parlant à l'astre, et, pâle, écoutant s'il répond ;  
Celle d'Imbrasia ; celle de l'Hellespont  
Qui se dresse déesse et qui retombe hyène ;  
Toi, Tiburtine ; et toi, la rauque Libyenne,  
Criant : Treize ! essayant la loi du nombre impair ;  
Toi dont le regard fixe inquiétait Vesper,  
Larve d'Endor ; et toi, les dents blanches d'écume,  
Les deux seins nus, ô folle effrayante de Cume ;  
Chaldéenne, filant un invisible fil ;  
Sardique à l'œil de chèvre, au tragique profil ;  
Toi, maigre et toute nue au soleil, Érythrée,  
D'azur et de lumière et d'horreur pénétrée ;  
Toi, Persique, habitant un sépulcre détruit,  
O face à qui parlaient les passants de la nuit  
Et les échevelés qui se penchent dans l'ombre ;  
Toi, mangeant du cresson dans ta fontaine sombre,  
Delphique ; après esprits, toutes, vous eûtes beau  
Hurler, frapper le vent, remuer le tombeau,  
Rouler vos fauves yeux dans la profondeur noire,  
Nulle de vous n'a vu clairement dans sa gloire  
Ce grand Dieu du pardon sur la terre levé.  
Sainte Thérèse, avec un soupir, l'a trouvé.

Victor Hugo alone could have written that ; and

Victor Hugo alone could have put into the mouth of an angel such superhuman words as these :—

Si tu ne l'entends pas, tu peux au moins le voir,  
L'hymne éternel, vibrant sous les éternels voiles.  
Les constellations sont des gammes d'étoiles ;  
Et les vents par moments te chantent des lambeaux  
Du chant prodigieux qui remplit les tombeaux.

Of this great new song which comes to us from the grave of Victor Hugo there is so much more to be said than any man could say at once that it may be well to disclaim all pretence of giving an analysis or even a summary of its component parts. Those who would know what it contains and what it conveys—its dramatic force, its philosophic insight, its evangelic passion—must be content and thankful to study it reverently and thoroughly for themselves.

## VIII

### TOUTE LA LYRE

#### I

1889

ONE thing may perhaps for once be prophesied without hazard of presumption in attempting to anticipate the verdict of future centuries : that it would be impossible for them to believe in the single authorship of the various works which bear the signature of Victor Hugo, if it were not impossible to believe that any other man could have bequeathed to eternity any one of his masterpieces in verse or prose. But the fact must be faced and admitted that in the fourth instalment of his posthumous works we have received a gift which of itself would suffice to secure for the giver a place among the greatest poets of all nations and all times. From the collection of later and earlier poems which bears the magnificent inscription of *Toute la Lyre* any reader might gather at random such samples as would serve for evidence of this. These are the forty-fourth and forty-fifth volumes of his collected works ; but were it possible that they should fall into the hands of a reader unacquainted with any other work of their author's and not incompetent to recognise at sight the evidence of supreme genius, he would at once acknowledge the presence, the hand, and the voice of one among the crowning writers of the world. The peculiar majesty of melody which no other poet can emulate or imitate—which places the singer as far

beyond reach of any mocking-bird as Coleridge or Shakespeare, the two English poets whose note has never been caught, whose cadence has never found an echo except in the heart of the hearer—this unique and magical quality of living music vibrates alike in every form of verse, in each variety of metre, to which the genius or the fancy, the passion or the thought of the musician may choose to incline or adapt itself. No one can mistake and no one can mimic it : it is always Hugo's alone, yet its changes and modulations are infinite. Even when it is used to repeat and reinforce some lesson or some message which it has often conveyed before, there is almost always some fresh note, some new grace of expression, some new fervour of inspiration in the delivery of the preacher if not in the subject-matter of his gospel. It would have seemed impossible that he should have anything new to bequeath us on the subject of the old revolution, Danton, Marat, Charlotte Corday, and all the other names and memories which crowd the splendid and sonorous verses of the opening poem : yet the following couplet on Marat is not an exceptional instance of the fresh and vivid and sublime energy which informs it :—

Il agite l'antique et monstreuse chaîne,<sup>1</sup>  
 Hideux, faisant sonner le fer contre sa haine.

Nor has the gospel of universal mercy and indiscriminate compassion ever found more simple and

<sup>1</sup> Marat's curious book, *Les Chaînes de l'Esclavage*, can hardly have deserved or obtained an allusion here from the greatest of modern dramatic poets ; for in that fierce and laborious impeachment of existing civilisation (pp. 62, 63) the rage of the Puritans against the theatre, as an engine of corruption and an instrument of royalism, finds a vehement and significant echo. Marat, very naturally and properly, cites Prynne in support of their common cause.

succinct expression than in these four weighty and melodious and memorable verses :—

Le droit n'a pas besoin de se mettre en fureur,  
Et d'arriver les mains pleines de violences,  
Et de jeter un glaive au plateau des balances.  
Il paraît, on tressaille ; il marche, on dit : C'est Dieu.

But it is not the preacher or the evangelist—earnest and fervent as is the sermon, ardent and sublime as is the apostolate—who commands and retains attention throughout the greater and the better part of this book : it is simply the poet ; the greatest maker and the sweetest singer of his age. Even in the second poem, which places on record a beautiful episode of battle recited by the author's father, there is a clearer note, a fresher air of pure and simple inspiration ; a more direct touch, a more immediate sense, of merely poetic, dramatic, or universal interest.<sup>1</sup> And in the sixteen verses of dialogue between the sheykh and the robber there is matter enough to secure immortality for the writer who could condense so much of what is noblest in human nature into such terse, vivid, straightforward and perfect expression. The effect could not be so fully and so briefly conveyed except in verse : but what other poet could have conveyed it as has this one, of all poets the most inexhaustible and indefatigable in sympathy with all noble emotion and in presentation of all chivalrous loyalty ?

Upon this side of his character, upon this phase of his genius, it would be exceptionally superfluous—where all attempts at praise may perhaps be considered superfluous—for a commentator on the posthumous

<sup>1</sup> The copy before me (second edition) has one of the most monstrous misprints on record in the twenty-eighth line of this poem—'seneur' for 'semoun.' The right reading was given in the *Rappel*, where the text first appeared in print. This incomprehensible and senseless corruption is worthy of a place in the first folio of Shakespeare.

work of Victor Hugo to dwell at any length, or to cite any examples as especially illustrative and significant. In a bird's-eye view of these two hundred poems the glance must needs alight more or less at random on this or that 'particular star' or flower which may not or which may be worthier of notice than any other of the train of spring or the host of heaven. But it may be safely said that they contain nothing more representative, more unattainable by any other man, more unmistakable as the work of no possible hand but their writer's, than the four following stanzas, descriptive and representative of rough weather by night':—

Le vent hurle, la rafale  
Sort, ruisselante cavale,  
Du gouffre obscur,  
Et, hennissant sur l'eau bleue,  
Des crins épars de sa queue  
Fouette l'azur.

L'horizon, que l'onde encombre,  
Serpent, au bas du ciel sombre  
Court tortueux ;  
Toute la mer est difforme ;  
L'eau s'emplit d'un bruit énorme  
Et monstrueux.

Le flot vient, s'enfuit, s'approche,  
Et bondit comme la cloche  
Dans le clocher,  
Puis tombe, et bondit encore ;  
La vague immense et sonore  
Bat le rocher.

L'océan frappe la terre.  
Oh ! le forgeron mystère,  
Au noir manteau,  
Que forge-t-il dans la brume,  
Pour battre une telle enclume  
D'un tel marteau ?

What English poet has translated that peculiar action of the sea as adequately, as superbly, as exactly, as it is rendered in these marvellous verses? What poet of any time or any nation has put more passionate and vivid imagination into more perfect metaphor with more sublime fidelity?

The terror of nature, the mystery of apparent and unapparent things, the malign and lurid side of what we see and imagine in the aspects of earth and sky at certain hours or moments, was never rendered by Shelley or by Coleridge into words more pregnant with passionate imagination and contagious awe than these :—

C'est l'heure où le sépulcre appelle la chouette.  
On voit sur l'horizon l'étrange silhouette  
D'un bras énorme ayant des courbes de serpent ;  
On dirait qu'il protège, on dirait qu'il répand  
On ne sait quel amour terrible dans cette ombre.  
Est-ce Arimane ?

O ciel, sous les astres sans nombre,  
Dans l'air, dans la nuée où volent les griffons,  
Dans le chaos confus des branchages profonds,  
Dans les prés, dans les monts, dans la grande mer verte,  
Dans l'immensité bleue aux aurores ouverte,  
Qu'est-ce donc que l'esprit de haine peut aimer ?  
Lui, qui veut tout tarir, que fait-il donc germer ?

Il semble heureux. Il parle aux choses invisibles ;  
Il leur parle si bas, si doucement, qu'on peut  
Entendre le rayon de lune qui se meut  
Et la vague rumeur des ruches endormies.

The task of selection from such a treasury of jewels as this book is so delicate and so difficult that perhaps the choice of quotations may as well be left to the decision of mere chance. But the student will do well



to collate for comparison the various studies after nature gathered together in the second division ; and to note especially among these such flawless little masterpieces of tender meditation or sublime impression as the moonlight landscape which brings before us the world as we see it

Quand la lune apparaît dans la brume des plaines,  
Quand l'ombre émue a l'air de retrouver la voix,  
Lorsque le soir emplît de frissons et d'haleines  
Les pâles ténèbres des bois.

Nous nous promènerons dans les campagnes vertes ;  
Nous pencherons, pleurant ce qui s'évanouit,  
Nos âmes ici-bas par le malheur ouvertes  
Sur les fleurs qui s'ouvrent la nuit !

La calme et sombre nuit ne fait qu'une prière  
De toutes les rumeurs de la nuit et du jour ;  
Nous, de tous les tourments de cette vie amère  
Nous ne ferons que de l'amour !

The milder melody of such lovely lines as these is relieved by the sterner and more condensed verse, the keener and more sombre imagination of such studies as *The Cloud*. All true lovers of Pyrenean scenery will rejoice to find that the glorious valley of Cauterets has been glorified by Victor Hugo as well as by his most illustrious contemporary fellow-poet. The solemn sweetness of Lord Tennyson's majestic verses is not more memorable or more characteristic than the visionary passion and the contemplative sublimity of Victor Hugo's :—

Le matin, les vapeurs, en blanches mousselines,  
Montent en même temps, à travers les grands bois,  
De tous les ravins noirs, de toutes les collines,  
De tous les sommets à la fois.

Un jour douteux ternit l'horizon ; l'aube est pâle ;  
Le ciel voilé n'a plus l'azur que nous aimons,  
Tant une brume épaisse à longs flocons s'exhale  
Des flancs monstrueux des vieux monts !

On croit les voir bondir comme au temps du prophète,  
Et l'on se dit, de crainte et de stupeur saisi :  
—O chevaux monstrueux ! quelle course ont-ils faite  
Que leurs croupes fument ainsi !

Compare with that southern landscape this northern  
vision of the sea :—

Quand la profonde nuit fait de l'ombre une geôle,  
Quand la vague, roulant d'un pôle à l'autre pôle,  
Se creuse en ténébreux vallons,  
Quand la mer monstrueuse et pleine de huées  
Regarde en frissonnant voler dans les nuées  
Les sombres aigles aquilons ;

Ou, plus tard, quand le jour, vague ébauche, commence . . .  
O plaine qui frémit ! bruit du matin immense !  
Tout est morne et lugubre encor ;  
L'horizon noir paraît plein des douleurs divines ;  
Le cercle des monts fait la couronne d'épines,  
L'aube fait l'auréole d'or !

Moi, pendant que tout rêve à ces spectacles sombres,  
Soit que la nuit, pareille aux temples en décombres,  
Obscurcisse l'azur bruni,  
Soit que l'aube apparue au front des cieux sincères  
Farouche et toute en pleurs, semble sur nos misères  
L'œil effaré de l'infini ;

Je songe au bord des eaux, triste ;—alors les pensées  
Qui sortent de la mer, d'un vent confus poussées,  
Filles de l'onde, essaim fuyant,  
Que l'âpre écume apporte à travers ses fumées,  
M'entourent en silence, et de leurs mains palmées  
M'entrouvrent le livre effrayant.

But it is not the darker side of nature which most attracts the imaginative sympathy of the great poet who could translate it into such accurate and tragic harmony of lyrical expression. The comfort and refreshment and reassurance of natural beauty can never have been more deeply felt or more thankfully acknowledged than by the writer of these lines :—

Là, rien ne s'interrompt, rien ne finit d'éclore ;  
 Le rosier respiré par Ève embaume encore  
     Nos deuils et nos amours ;  
 Et la pervenche est plus éternelle que Rome ;  
 Car ce qui dure peu, monts et forêts, c'est l'homme ;  
     Les fleurs durent toujours.

Not only the beauty and the mystery of nature but her ugliness and dulness have afforded occasion to great painters for great pictures ; and even such a masterpiece as that marvellous work of Rubens which sets before us the ghastly and haggard horror of the deadly and sultry landscape in which the Escorial is set like a death's-head in a ring is no finer example of the beauty which art may succeed in evoking or evolving out of ugly nature than such a poem as that which describes the mean and sullen country where a smoky little hamlet may be seen on the far horizon,

Le paysage étant plat comme MÉRIMÉE.

That final stroke of sudden sarcasm on the courtly cynic who so long outlived the glittering and unfruitful promise of his youth may be compared with a similar touch at the close of the poem just quoted, in which the returned exile summons his children and his friends to the fields and woods where they need no longer know or care if Parliament is sitting and trifling at Versailles or at Saint-Cloud,

Et si le pape enfin daigne rougir la jupe  
 Du prêtre dont le nom commence comme dupe  
 Et finit comme loup.

Such passing shafts of satire show a happier hand and a truer aim than some of the 'swashing blows' delivered in the eighth or supplementary section of this book. But none of Hugo's personal reflections or retorts seem to me quite as good and quite as happy as the ever-memorable description or definition of Sainte-Beuve—'homme distingué et inférieur, ayant l'envie pardonnable à la laideur.'<sup>1</sup> The late Mgr. Dupanloup, I presume, has hardly so many admirers in England that it might be necessary to vindicate the justice of the sarcasm applied to him: but the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, who cannot in charity or in reason be supposed to have known much more of the man's character than he knew of French poetry or Irish politics, has lavished so much praise on that incarnation of envy that the temperate and sparing phrase by which Hugo has made the backbiter's name immortal may probably give some surprise if not some offence to English admirers—at second-hand—of the versatile and venomous rhetorician who wrote, as well as his *Causeries du Lundi*, a certain furtive series of anonymous articles republished since his death under the title of *Chroniques Parisiennes*. The man who has not read these has but an imperfect conception of the meaning of the terms malignity and meanness, platitude and perversity, decrepitude of cankered intelligence and desperation of universal rancour.<sup>2</sup>

But the bitterness of scorn and the fervour of indig-

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire d'un Crime*, iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> I may add that Mr. Arnold himself, even when writing on Shelley or on Burns, hardly showed such depth of incompetence combined with such shallowness of apprehension as Sainte-Beuve when writing on Villon.

nation which animate the strictures of a great poet on such literary or political underlings as these might serve—if that were needful—to give the measure of his tenderness and his devotion when dealing with things sacred and divine. That this book should contain verses worthy of a place in *L'Art d'être Grand-père* proves at once that their subject is inexhaustible and that the genius of its chosen poet-laureate was as inexhaustible as the fascination of infancy itself:—

Il vit à peine ; il est si chétif qu'il réclame  
Du brin d'herbe ondoyant aux vents un point d'appui.  
Parfois, lorsqu'il se tait, on le croit presque enfui,  
Car on a peur que tout ici-bas ne le blesse.  
Lui, que fait-il ? Il rit. Fait d'ombre et de faiblesse  
Et de tout ce qui tremble, il ne craint rien. Il est  
Parmi nous le seul être encore vierge et complet ;  
L'ange devient enfant lorsqu'il se rapetisse.

Toutes les vérités couronnent condensées  
Ce doux front qui n'a pas encore de pensées ;  
On comprend que l'enfance, ange de nos douleurs,  
Si petit ici-bas, doit être grand ailleurs.  
Il se traîne, il trébuche ; il n'a dans l'attitude,  
Dans la voix, dans le geste aucune certitude ;  
Un souffle à qui la fleur résiste fait ployer  
Cet être à qui fait peur le grillon du foyer ;  
L'œil hésite pendant que la lèvre bégaye ;  
Dans ce naïf regard que l'ignorance égaie  
L'étonnement avec la grâce se confond,  
Et l'immense lueur étoilée est au fond.

The three following ' children's epitaphs ' combine the perfect grace of Greek expression with the deep fervour of a later faith and a personal emotion:—

## I

Enfant, que je te porte envie !  
Ta barque neuve échoue au port.  
Qu'as-tu donc fait pour que ta vie  
Ait sitôt mérité la mort ?

## II

Entre au ciel. La porte est la tombe.  
Le sombre avenir des humains,  
Comme un jouet trop lourd qui tombe,  
S'échappe à tes petites mains.

## III

Qu'est devenu l'enfant ? La mère  
Pleure, et l'oiseau rit, chanfre ailé.  
La mère croit qu'il est sous terre,  
L'oiseau sait qu'il s'est envolé.

After these any reader might expect that the next poem following must seem at least to fall off in perfection of pathos or in simplicity of sweetness. But the next poem following is this :—

Aucune aile ici-bas n'est pour longtemps posée.  
Quand elle était petite, elle avait un oiseau ;  
Elle le nourrissait de pain et de rosée  
Et veillait sur son nid comme sur un berceau.  
Un soir il s'échappa. Que de plaintes amères !  
Dans mes bras en pleurant je la vis accourir. . . .  
Jeunes filles, laissez, laissez, ô jeunes mères,  
Les oiseaux s'envoler et les enfants mourir !

C'est une loi d'en haut qui veut que tout nous quitte ;  
Le secret du Seigneur, nous le saurons un jour.  
Elle grandit. La vie, hélas ! marche si vite !  
Elle eut un doux enfant, un bel ange, un amour.  
Une nuit, triste sort des choses éphémères !  
Cet enfant s'éteignit, sans pleurer, sans souffrir. . . .  
Jeunes filles, laissez, laissez, ô jeunes mères,  
Les oiseaux s'envoler et les enfants mourir !

For all future readers the pathetic impression of this exquisite lyrical elegy will be heightened by consideration of its date—one year and seventy-three days before that of the catastrophe which darkened for so long the life of the writer, and at last inspired the most fervent, the most profound, and the most sublime

poems that ever gave late relief and imperishable expression to the sorrow of a great poet and a bereaved father.

But this greatest of elegiac poets was no less great—we might say that out of his infinite condescension he deigned to show himself no less great—as a gnostic or didactic poet of the simplest and homeliest morality. The brief rebuke addressed to those who think it no sin or shame to indulge in small habitual transgressions or evasions of the lofty law and the rigid rule of honour has a grandeur of its own which fits it for a place between two faultless lyrics. Its lesson of uprightness and noble purity is conveyed in language of a simplicity as limpid as the spirit of its teaching is sublime :—

Qu'est-ce que l'océan ? une onde après une onde.

Homme, la conscience est une minutie  
L'âme est plus aisément que l'hermine, noircie.  
L'aube sans s'amoindrir toujours partout entra.  
Ne crois pas que jamais, parce qu'on les mettra  
Dans les moindres recoins de l'âme, on rapetisse  
La probité, l'honneur le droit et la justice.

From the lines addressed to one of his most faithful friends I take the following three in example of the serene wisdom which the writer had gathered from experience of chequered fortunes and of recurrent animosities :—

Aux éblouissements de l'aube je calcule  
La morne hostilité qu'aura le crépuscule.  
*Qui ne fut point haï n'a vécu qu'à demi.*

Here, as in almost all Victor Hugo's various books of verse, the tragic visionary of the *Contemplations* alternately succeeds and gives place to the preacher of trust and hope, the apostle of love and charity.

Tous vont cherchant, aucun ne trouve.  
 Le ciel semble à leur désespoir  
 Noir comme l'ancre d'une louve,  
 Au fond d'un bois, l'hiver, le soir.

Où vont-ils ? vers la même porte.  
 Que sont-ils ? les flots d'un torrent.  
 Que disent-ils ? la nuit l'emporte.  
 Que font-ils ? la tombe le prend.

Another note of equally noble sadness is struck in the melodious lines which half deplore the transiency of sorrow :—

L'homme que le chagrin ne peut longtemps plier  
 Passe ; tout nous est bon, hélas ! pour oublier ;  
 La contemplation berce, apaise et console ;  
 Le cœur laisse, emporté par l'aîle qui l'isole,  
 Tomber les souvenirs en montant dans l'azur ;  
 Le tombeau le plus cher n'est plus qu'un point obscur.  
 Ceux qui vivent chantant, riant sans fin ni trêve,  
 Ont bien vite enterré leurs morts ; celui qui rêve  
 N'est pas un meilleur vase à conserver le deuil.  
 La nature emplit l'âme en éblouissant l'œil ;  
 Et l'araignée oublie, quand elle tend sa toile,  
 D'un bout l'attache à l'homme et de l'autre à l'étoile.

No poem of Victor Hugo's is a finer example of that vivid and intense imagination which makes the world of vision seem wellnigh tangible and palpable than that which records the strange grim dream of the great stone lions in the wilderness :—

Étaient-ce des rochers ? Étaient-ce des fantômes ?  
 Peut-être avaient-ils vu tomber bien des royaumes.

The supernatural realism of the whole vision surpasses the most imaginative work of Shelley and recalls the most imaginative work of Coleridge.

But it is impossible even to indicate more than a thousandth part of the treasure contained in these



seven books. The poems of meditation and depression, aspiration and faith, touch again on keys of thought and feeling often touched before, but never without striking some new note. From these I quote but one more stanza, to which even the author has left us few that are superior, if hundreds upon hundreds that are equal :—

L'ancre est un poids qui rompt le câble.  
 Tout est promis, rien n'est tenu.  
 Serait-ce donc que l'implacable  
 Est un des noms de l'inconnu ?  
 Quel est donc ce maître farouche  
 Qui pour la toile fait la mouche,  
 L'orageux cheval pour le mors,  
 Tous les escaliers pour descendre,  
 Oui pour non, le feu pour la cendre,  
 La mémoire pour le remords ?

The brighter and lighter poems of this many-voiced, and many-coloured book are not less full of spontaneous grace and native strength than those which deal with matter of meditation or of mourning. All the joy of a great poet in his art, all the pleasure of a great artist in his work, find utterance here and there in it : as likewise does all the scorn of a great man for pedants, of a good man for unbelievers in goodness :—

Definitions : Mesdames  
 Et messieurs, l'ancien bon goût,  
 C'est l'âne ayant charge d'âmes,  
 C'est Rien grand prêtre de Tout.

C'est bête sans être fauve,  
 C'est prêcher sans enseigner,  
 C'est Phœbus devenu chauve,  
 Qui tâche de se peigner.

Such notes as these give new life and variety to the inexhaustible concert which includes also the majestic

lines on the reason for the sufferings of great men, the superb allegory on the danger of spiritual high places, and the noble elegy—now at last restored to circulation—on the death of Théophile Gautier.

Any student would at once recognise the author of the following four lines :—

La rosée inondait les fleurs à peine écloses ;  
Elles jouaient, riant de leur rire sans fiel.  
Deux choses ici-bas vont bien avec les roses,  
Le rire des enfants et les larmes du ciel.

Among the many personal poems here collected and arranged with admirable care and taste I venture to select as especially notable and noble the lines addressed to two friends of the writer who were at enmity with each other ; presumably, if I may conjecture, from the indications given or suggested in the poem, Alexandre Dumas and Jules Janin. But the lyrical elegy on Mme. Gay de Girardin, though it cannot be more loftily pathetic or more tenderly impressive than this appeal of an exile to be allowed the pleasure of reconciling friends at variance—and at home,—is more remarkable for the magnificent fascination of its metrical quality :—

Paix à vous, bon cœur utile,  
Beaux yeux clos,  
Esprit splendide et fertile !  
Elle aimait ma petite île,  
Mes grands flots,

Ces champs de trèfle et de seigle,  
Ce doux sol,  
L'océan que l'astre règle,  
Et mon noir rocher, où l'aigle  
Prend son vol.

. . . . .

Dieu, c'est la nuit que tu sèmes  
En créant  
Les hommes, ces noirs problèmes ;  
Nous sommes les masques blêmes  
Du néant ;

Nous sommes l'algue et la houle,  
O semeur !  
Nous flottons ; le vent nous roule ;  
Toute notre œuvre s'écroule  
En rumeur.

Pendant qu'assis sous les branches,  
Nous pleurons,  
Âme, tu souris, tu penches  
Tes deux grandes ailes blanches  
Sur nos fronts.

Dieu, là, dans ce sombre monde,  
Met l'amour,  
Et tous les ports dans cette onde,  
Et dans cette ombre profonde  
Tout le jour.

O vivants qui dans la brume,  
Dans le deuil,  
Passez comme un flot qui fume  
Et n'êtes que de l'écume  
Sur l'écueil,

Vivez dans les clartés fausses,  
Expiez !  
Moi, Dieu bon qui nous exauce !  
Je sens remuer les fosses  
Sous mes pieds.

Il est temps que je m'en aille  
Loin du bruit,  
Sous la ronce et la broussaille,  
Retrouver ce qui tressaille  
Dans la nuit.

Tous mes nœuds dans le mystère  
Sont dissous.  
L'ombre est ma patrie austère.  
J'ai moins d'amis sur la terre  
Que dessous.

Among more poems of similar if not equal beauty, that which describes the author's visit to Jersey, twenty years after his first arrival, seems to me to stand out as though invested with a special sublimity of pathos. The sweetness of the shore, the splendour of the sea, the fragrance of the heather, the grandeur of the cliffs 'que l'onde ignore et ronge,' the glory and the beauty of cloud and flower, of wind and foam, all serve as heralds to the closing thought—

Et combien vivaient, qui sont morts !

It was supposed that Hugo, like Landor, had never written—had perhaps vowed never to write—a sonnet ; but the one headed *Ave, Dea ; moriturus te salutat*, may be ranked among the grandest and most graceful in the world. The three which find place in a later division of the book are perhaps unique in their fusion of poetry with irony and humour with imagination : but this one is perfect in its sweet and serious union of courtesy with melancholy :—

Nous sommes tous les deux voisins du ciel, madame,  
Puisque vous êtes belle et puisque je suis vieux.

But the verses on dawn in a churchyard strike perhaps even a finer note in the same key of thought ; and those written as it were in aspiring anticipation of death have in them even a deeper and loftier music than these.

The sixth section of this book has something in it of the *Contemplations*, but more of the *Chansons des*

*Rues et des Bois* ; and in strength and in grace of expression and of thought it is worthy of comparison with either. The 'roman en trois sonnets' is perhaps even finer in its mixture of serious humour and frank irony with boyish passion and adolescent fancy than any of the most ideal and realistic poems in the collection last mentioned :—

Fille de mon portier ! l'Érymanthe sonore  
Devant vous sentirait tressaillir ses pins verts ;  
L'Horeb, dont le sommet étonne l'univers,  
Inclinerait son cèdre altier qu'un peuple adore.

The other poems of childish or juvenile emotions or experiences are equally perfect in their graver and lighter shades or tones of expression. They belong to a class which is not represented in the poet's earlier volumes : their mixture of emotion with observation, of ideal with physical imagination or experience, seems rather to challenge contrast than comparison with the more seriously contemplative style which denotes an earlier stage in the work or the thought or the feeling of the writer. Nothing in that style can be more complete or more charming than these verses—which bear the date of 1835 :—

Vois-tu, mon ange, il faut accepter nos douleurs.  
L'amour est comme la rosée  
Qui luit de mille feux et de mille couleurs  
Dans l'ombre où l'aube l'a posée ;

Rien n'est plus radieux sous le haut firmament.  
De cette goutte d'eau qui rayonne un moment  
N'approchez pas vos yeux que tant de splendeur charme.  
De loin, c'était un diamant ;  
De près, ce n'est plus qu'une larme.

But the poetry which sensualists might condemn as sentimental has scarcely such clearness of outline or

such perfection of colour as the poetry which sentimentalists might condemn as sensual. The noble and simple treatment of natural passion or instinct, impossible alike to the grovelling bigot and to the grovelling libertine, may evoke frowns on the one hand and sneers on the other : for neither can be expected to appreciate the spirit and the sense of such lines as these :—

Sa tendre obéissance était haute et sereine ;  
Elle savait se faire esclave et rester reine,  
*Suprême grâce ! et quoi de plus inattendu*  
Que d'avoir tout donné sans avoir rien perdu !

Elle vous caressait avec de la lumière ;  
La nudité des pieds fait la marche plus fière  
Chez ces êtres pétris d'idéale beauté ;  
*Il lui venait dans l'ombre au front une clarté*  
Pareille à la nocturne auréole des pôles ;  
À travers les baisers, de ses blanches épaules  
On croyait voir sortir deux ailes lentement ;  
Son regard était bleu, d'un bleu de firmament ;  
Et c'était la grandeur de cette femme étrange  
Qu'en cessant d'être vierge elle devenait ange.

And the grace and the charm of these equally divine and human verses are not more wonderful or more perfect than the grace of expression and the charm of humour which animate the more fanciful poems expressive of boyish impulse or of dreamy adolescence. Even the delightful record of the infantine couple who alighted at the Holly-tree Inn and made it immortal is not more delightful—or more lamentable in its catastrophe—than this most perfect little poem :—

J'atteignais l'âge austère où l'on est fort en thème,  
Où l'on cherche, enivré d'on ne sait quel parfum,  
Afin de pouvoir dire éperdûment : Je t'aime !  
Quelqu'un.

J'entrais dans ma treizième année. O feuilles vertes !  
 Jardins ! croissance obscure et douce du printemps !  
 Et j'aimais Hermina, dans l'ombre. Elle avait, certes,  
 Huit ans.

Parfois, bien qu'elle fût à jouer occupée,  
 J'allais, muet, m'asseoir près d'elle, avec ferveur,  
 Et je la regardais regarder sa poupée,  
 Rêveur.

Il est une heure étrange où l'on sent l'âme naître ;  
 Un jour, j'eus comme un chant d'aurore au fond du cœur.  
 Soit, pensai-je, avançons, parlons ! c'est l'instant d'être  
 Vainqueur !

Je pris un air profond, et je lui dis :—Minette,  
 Unissons nos destins. Je demande ta main.—  
 Elle me répondit par cette pichenette :  
 —Gamin !

Such is life—as Mrs. Harris long since observed ;  
 but happily it is not likewise 'the end of all things.'  
 In the next lyric the lover has wellnigh come to years  
 of indiscretion : but the perfect and wonderful  
 mastery of verse which does into words the emotion  
 of this only less innocent intrigue is no less evident in  
 every line and in the turn of every stanza :—

J'étais le songeur qui pense,  
 Elle était l'oiseau qui fuit ;  
 Je l'adorais en silence,  
 Elle m'aimait à grand bruit.

Quand dans quelque haute sphère  
 Je croyais planer vainqueur,  
 Je l'entendais en bas faire  
 Du vacarme dans mon cœur.

Mais je reprenais mon songe  
 Et je l'adorais toujours,  
 Crédule au divin mensonge  
 Des roses et des amours.

Les profondeurs constellées,  
L'aube, la lune qui naît,  
Amour, me semblaient mêlées  
Aux rubans de son bonnet.

If ever there should seem—I do not say that there ever seems to me—to be any touch of monotony or any tediousness of repetition in the innumerable studies of early love or adolescent fancy which we owe to the retrospective or imaginative author of *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois*, there is certainly no deduction of the kind to be made from the enjoyment with which all fit and competent readers must receive any fresh instalment of his no less innumerable studies after nature—of such, more especially, as this one, taken

Dans les ravins où mai plein de roses abonde,  
Là les papillons blancs et les papillons bleus,  
Ainsi que le divin se mêle aux fabuleux,  
Vont et viennent, croisant leurs essors gais et lestes,  
Si bien qu'on les prendrait pour des lueurs célestes.

J'aime la vision de ces réalités ;  
La vie aux yeux sereins luit de tous les côtés ;  
La chanson des forêts est d'une douceur telle  
Que, si Phébus l'entend quand, rêveur, il dételle  
Ses chevaux las souvent au point de haleter,  
Il s'arrête, et fait signe aux muses d'écouter.

English readers will be reminded by the following extract of one of Mr. Browning's most perfect and pathetic minor poems :—

Cela la désennuie : elle vit toute seule,  
Elle est pauvre et travaille, elle n'est pas bégueule ;  
Elle échange de loin, et pour se reposer,  
Un regard, et parfois, de la main, un baiser  
Avec un voisin, seul aussi dans sa mansarde.  
Et c'est étrange comme un baiser qu'on hasarde



Sait son chemin, et comme il a le don vainqueur  
De partir de la bouche et d'arriver au cœur.

Et peut-être jamais ne se parlera-t-on.  
Car l'amour ébauché quelquefois se prolonge  
Dans la nuée au point de finir par un songe,  
Et souvent, au moment où l'on croyait tenir  
Une espérance, on voit que c'est un souvenir.

It seems irreverent and stupid to select and to curtail, to omit and to prefer, when dealing with such poems as these ; but no one could venture to mutilate by partial citation the following divine verses :—

#### CE QUE DIT CELLE QUI N'A PAS PARLÉ

L'énigme ne dit pas son mot ;  
Les flèches d'or ont des piqures  
Dont on ne parle pas tout haut ;  
Souvent, sous les branches obscures,

Plus d'un tendre oiseau se perdit.  
Vous m'avez souvent dit : je t'aime !  
Et je ne vous l'ai jamais dit.  
Vous prodiguiez le cri suprême,

Je refusais l'aveu profond.  
Le lac bleu sous la lune rêve,  
Et, muet, dans la nuit se fond.  
L'eau se tait quand l'astre se lève.

L'avez-vous donc trouvé mauvais ?  
En se taisant le cœur se creuse,  
Et, quand vous étiez là, j'avais  
Le doux tremblement d'être heureuse.

Vous parliez trop, moi pas assez.  
L'amour commence par de l'ombre ;  
Les nids, du grand jour sont blessés ;  
Les choses ont leur pudeur sombre.

Aujourd'hui—comme, au vent du soir,  
L'arbre tristement se balance !—  
Vous me quittez, n'ayant pu voir  
Mon âme à travers mon silence.

Soit ! nous allons nous séparer.  
—Oh ! comme la forêt soupire !—  
Demain qui me verra pleurer  
Peut-être vous verra sourire.

Ce doux mot qu'il faut effacer  
—Je t'aime—aujourd'hui me déchire.  
Vous le disiez sans le penser,  
Moi je le pensais sans le dire.

A more absolutely perfect piece of work than that was never wrought by human hand. Its tender simplicity, its translucent depth of pathos, its sweetness and its truthfulness, may be felt on a first reading ; but its marvellous quality of execution, the subtle magic of its style, the incomparable and instinctive choice of phrase which makes a miracle of every line, can only and can hardly be appreciated in full after longer and more loving study than any but the masterpieces of lyric poetry deserve and require and reward.

The fancy and the melody, the grace of form and the freshness of feeling, which distinguish the ten poems following on this one, bear evidence for the thousandth time to the exuberance of inspiration, the inexhaustible and joyous energy of song, perceptible alike in the latest and in the earliest work of Victor Hugo. Like the kings of painting, he can make of the commonest model an angelic or a queenly figure without the least transgression of fidelity to truth. The touches of romantic or imaginative suggestion which relieve the realism of his studies do not impair the lifelike simplicity of their general effect. Musset

could no more have given such nobility of tone to the sketch of a girl than could Béranger ; yet no Lisette or Mimi Pinson is more actually alive than the Thérèse whom a greater poet has glorified and transfigured by such verses as these :—

Quel destin traversera-t-elle ?  
 Quelle ivresse ? quelle douleur ?  
 Elle n'en sait rien ; cette belle  
 Rit, et se coiffe d'une fleur.

Elle s'ébat comme les cygnes ;  
 Et sa chevelure et sa voix  
 Et son sourire seraient dignes  
 De la fauve grandeur des bois.

But at every leaf we turn we come upon some passage of beauty as rare as this ; the eye is caught again, the attention is solicited anew, by some equally magnificent or lovely touch of genius :—

Aux instants où les cœurs se parlent sans rien dire,  
 Il voyait s'éclairer de pudeur et d'amour,  
 Comme une eau qui reflète un ciel d'ombre et de jour,  
 Ton visage pensif, tour à tour pâle et rose ;  
 Et souvent il sentait, ô la divine chose !  
 Dans ce doux abandon, des anges seuls connu,  
 Se poser sur son pied ton pied charmant et nu.

From the radiant *Idylle de Floriane* I venture to take two jewels for sample of all contained in the seven golden caskets of this poem :—

Les bleuets la trouvaient belle ;  
 L'air vibrat ; il est certain  
 Qu'on était fort épris d'elle  
 Dans le trèfle et dans le thym.

Comme elle était familière  
Avec les bois d'ombre emplis !  
—Pardieu, disait un vieux lierre,  
Je l'ai vue autrefois lys !

It is impossible to say whether the matchless grace of touch and the living impulse of melody common to all these poems alike are more evident in such lighter notes as these or in the graver music of such stanzas as the following :—

Là, le soir, à l'heure où tout penche,  
Où Dieu bénit,  
Où la feuille baise la branche,  
L'aile le nid,

Tous ces objets saints qui nous virent  
Dans nos beaux jours,  
Et qui, tout palpitants, soupirent  
De nos amours,

Tous les chers hôtes du bois sombre,  
Pensifs et doux,  
Avant de s'endormir, dans l'ombre,  
Parlent de nous.

That the poems dealing with the passion or even with the fancy or the vision of love which belong to the later years of the life of Victor Hugo are more vivid and fervent in their treatment of the subject chosen or their translation of the feeling expressed than the contemplative and elegiac verses of his youth, or even of his earlier manhood and middle age, is a fact which no student can possibly overlook, or can rationally refuse to accept as singular and suggestive. Many remarks might be made on it, and many inferences might be drawn from it ; but to me it seems simply a proof of the truth that the force of imagination and the power of expression must needs increase and grow

up together, as in Shakespeare's case they so evidently did, whether or not the more ardent and actual passions or emotions of the writer may survive or may subside. But in any case no more enchanting and superb submission to the advance of time was ever made, or was ever cast into sweeter notes of sighing or laughing music, than in the divine levity and the smiling resignation of these three stanzas :—

Horace, et toi, vieux La Fontaine,  
Vous avez dit : Il est un jour  
Où le cœur qui palpite à peine  
Sent comme une chanson lointaine  
Mourir la joie et fuir l'amour.<sup>1</sup>

O poètes, l'amour réclame  
Quand vous dites : ' Nous n'aimons plus,  
Nous pleurons, nous n'avons plus d'âme,  
Nous cachons dans nos cœurs sans flamme  
Cupidon goutteux et perclus.'

Le temps d'aimer jamais ne passe ;  
Non, jamais le cœur n'est fermé !  
Hélas ! vieux Jean, ce qui s'efface,  
Ce qui s'en va, mon doux Horace,  
C'est le temps où l'on est aimé.

To some, perhaps to many students of the greatest poet of our age, the seventh division of this book will give yet keener and more various delight than all the rest. All will rejoice in the gift of a third echo song as perfect and as brilliant in its music as the jester's

<sup>1</sup> I cannot refrain from the observation that they never can have said that : for the poet who could do so even now would be the equal—would have caught the spirit and echoed the voice—of Victor Hugo. The cynical resignation of the courtier who felt that ' he had had his share of fun, his share of eating and drinking, and now it was time for him to take himself off,' never cast itself into such music ; and the childlike simplicity of the immortal fabulist, whom all children not ignorant of his charm will always love and laugh with, never struck so full a chord or touched so deep a note as this.

song in *Cromwell* and even as *La Chasse du Burgrave* itself. Gautier observed long since that the mastery of the master's hand, its instinctive touch of the right note, was as infallible and as exquisite in such metrical sports and whimsies as in the gravest and the loftiest forms of verse. The last two stanzas of *La Blanche Aminte* would suffice to prove it :—

Longtemps le sérail infidèle  
 D'elle  
 Parla, puis de ses cheveux blonds  
 Longs,  
 Les blanches qu'à Chypre on rencontre  
 Contre,  
 Et les noires de Visapour  
 Pour.

And from *Le Prince Fainéant*, at the first opening of his lazy lips, we get a fresh echo of the swelling and rolling music, dancing like a wave and ringing like a trumpet, which fired all hearts and took all ears with rapture, now sixty years ago, in *Le Pas d'Armes du Roi Jean*.

But the next poem has no parallel that I can remember in all the vast and various universe of poetry created by the *fiat lux* of Victor Hugo. The radiant loveliness of every detail serves to intensify and vivify the suggestive darkness of the close. Never was the beauty of jewels so delicately rendered into gemlike words as here :—

Que fait l'orfèvre ? Il achève  
 Quelque anneau mystérieux.  
 Sa boutique semble un rêve  
 Qu'emplissent de vagues yeux ;  
 L'opale est une prunelle,  
 La turquoise est un regard ;  
 La flamme tremble éternelle  
 Dans l'œil du rubis regard.

L'émeraude en sa facette  
Cache une ondine au front clair ;  
La vicomtesse de Certe  
Avait les yeux verts de mer.

Le diamant sous son voile  
Rêve, des cieux ébloui ;  
Il regarde tant l'étoile  
Que l'étoile entre dans lui.

L'ambre est une larme austère ;  
Le saphir au chaste feu  
Est devenu bleu sous terre  
Tant il a contemplé Dieu.

Une femme chez l'orfèvre  
Entre, sourire éclatant ;  
Les paroles sur sa lèvre  
Battent de l'aile en chantant.

Elle porte un châle à palmes,  
Un chapeau rose charmant ;  
Autour de ses grands yeux calmes  
Tout frissonne doucement.

Elle brille et jase, et semble  
Lueur, parfum, colibri ;  
Si belle que le cœur tremble,  
S'étonne, et cherche un abri.

Où va-t-elle ? d'où sort-elle ?  
D'où sort l'aube ? où va le jour ?  
Elle est la joie, étincelle  
De cette flamme, l'amour.

Elle choisit chez l'orfèvre  
Tous les beaux bijoux tremblants ;  
Et l'or semble avoir la fièvre  
Entre ces petits doigts blancs.

Elle prend tout, la pirate ;  
L'aigue, sœur des gouttes d'eau,  
Les agates de Surate  
Et les émaux du Lido,

Et la parure complète  
De sardoine et de béryl.  
Elle éclate à chaque emplette  
D'un doux rire puéril.

La perle voit cette belle.  
Pourquoi fuir, perle au doux front ?  
—J'aime mieux la mer, dit-elle ;  
C'est moins sombre et moins profond.

The little poem addressed to a little Chinese beauty is a most exquisite example of the poet's lighter style, sweet and bright and flawless as the most perfect work of Chinese or Japanese art ; but the date appended gives a tragic and historic association to the nativity of this radiant little child of song which must leave the reader amazed at the wild and incongruous caprices of inexplicable chance :—

Vierge du pays du thé,  
Dans ton beau rêve enchanté  
Le ciel est une cité  
Dont la Chine est la banlieue.

Dans notre Paris obscur  
Tu cherches, fille au front pur,  
Tes jardins d'or et d'azur  
Où le paon ouvre sa queue ;

Et tu souris à nos cieux.  
A ton âge un nain joyeux  
Sur la faïence des yeux  
Peint l'innocence, fleur bleue.

These lines were written by Victor Hugo on the 1st of December 1851.

This seventh casket contains twenty-four more jewels of incomparable verse ; but only one or two can here be offered as samples of its many-coloured treasure. The lines to a rat feeding on the litter of worthless books and the rubbish of rotting reviews are as full of brilliant



life and spontaneous grace as of that vivid wit which is the splendour of good sense :—

Rat, tu soupes et tu déjeunes  
Avec des romans refroidis,  
Des vers morts, et des quatrains jeunes  
Jadis.

O rat, tu ronges et tu songes !  
Tu mâches dans ton galetas  
Les vieux dogmes et les vieux songes  
En tas.

C'est pour toi qui gaîment les fêtes  
Qu'écrivent les bons Patouillets ;  
C'est pour toi que les gens sont bêtes  
Et laids.

Rat, c'est pour toi qui les dissèques  
Que les sonnets et les sermons  
Disent dans les bibliothèques :  
Dormons !

The brightness and beauty, the wit and truth and humour, of the tiny lyrical comedies—'comédies injouables qui se jouent sans cesse'—which compose the tenth subdivision of this seventh book would suffice to make the writer's name immortal in the memory of all who know poetry or nature when they see it. But the set of eleven songs with which the book winds up, and the seventh string of the lyre leaves the sense of its final vibration in our ears, could only be described by a hand which could rival the description of the jewels so lately cited. The loyal love of Spain which never ceased to animate the recollection of the great poet whose boyhood had been fostered in the country of the Cid gives a sort of personal charm to the splendid simplicity of these unsurpassable sixteen lines :—

J'avais une bague, une bague d'or,  
Et je l'ai perdue hier dans la ville ;  
Je suis pandériste et toréador,  
Guitare à Grenade, épée à Séville.

Mon anneau luit plus que l'astre vermeil ;  
Le diable, caché dans l'œil de ma brune,  
Pourrait seul produire un bijou pareil  
S'il faisait un jour un trou dans la lune.

Si vous retrouvez l'anneau n'importe où,  
Rapportez-le-moi. C'est Gil qu'on me nomme.  
Certes, je vaux peu ; je ne suis qu'un sou,  
Mais près d'un liard je suis gentilhomme.

Je n'ai que mon chant comme le moineau.  
Rendez-moi ma bague, et que Dieu vous paie !  
Vous connaissez Jeanne ? Eh bien, cet anneau,  
C'est, avec son cœur, le seul or que j'aie.

Between this and the last song I propose to transcribe in full comes one ' whose lightness and brightness doth shine in such splendour ' as Béranger at his lightest and Musset at his brightest could not match ; but ' the ghost's song ' which follows it recalls while it eclipses the loftier lyrical achievements and the nobler poetic names of Francis Beaumont and John Webster :

Qui donc êtes-vous, la belle ?  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Une vierge était chez nous ;  
Ses yeux étaient ses bijoux.  
Je suis la vierge, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous êtes en blanc, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
En gardant les grands bœufs roux,  
Claude lui fit les yeux doux.  
Je suis la fille, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous portez des fleurs, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Les vents et les cœurs sont fous ;  
Un baiser les fit époux.  
Je suis l'amante, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous avez pleuré, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Elle eut un fils, prions tous,  
Dieu le prit sur ses genoux.  
Je suis la mère, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous êtes pâle, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Elle s'enfuit dans les trous,  
Sinistre, avec les hiboux.  
Je suis la folle, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

Vous avez bien froid, la belle ;  
Comment vous appelez-vous ?  
Les amours et les yeux doux  
De nos cercueils sont les clous.  
Je suis la morte, dit-elle.  
Cueillez la branche de houx.

The simple and natural tragedy of a star-crossed life was never before done into words and set to music so divine. The 'biers of hazel grey' with which the 'many widows' of Chevy Chase 'came to fetch their makes away' were less tragic than the hazel-bough which bears the burden of these six stanzas.

That the song of the envious cynic which jingles so bitter and venomous a tune of hatred and malice as might once more have excited the raging envy of a Planche or a Saint-Beuve should have fallen in faultless verse from the same hand which wrote the sweetest and noblest lyric poems of our age—which could write even such a poem as the last here transcribed—is but one more sign that the infinite variety of the writer's creative or representative genius was as inexhaustible as the dramatic energy of his interest in human instinct or in human character.

Le destin, ce dieu sans tête  
Et bête,  
A fait l'animal  
Fort mal.

Il fit d'une fange immonde  
Le monde,  
Et d'un fiel amer  
La mer.

Tout se tient par une chaîne  
De haine ;  
On voit dans les fleurs  
Des pleurs.

If the whole soul of pessimism, pious or impious, is not there condensed and spiritualised, it is surely in quintessence here :—

Homme, mon frère, nous sommes  
Deux hommes,  
Et, pleins de venins,  
Deux nains.

Ton désir secret concerte  
Ma perte,  
Et mon noir souhait  
Te hait ;

Car ce globe où la mer tremble  
Nous semble  
Pour notre appétit  
Petit.

Nous manquons, sur sa surface,  
De place  
Pour notre néant  
Géant.

The satire conveyed in such lyric or dramatic form as this will probably seem to most readers more effective in expression, and worthier of the greatest poet of his country and our century, than the elaborate and

monotonous invective of the supplementary section. The two songs of Gavroche are delightful beyond all praise; but the brutal, treacherous, apathetic and selfish Englishman must be excused if he declines—in common with the thankless and trustless Italian—to accept that young citizen as an ideal President of the United States of Europe. And much of his creator's rhetoric, in the eighth division of this book, might plausibly if not fairly be described, by readers neither unfriendly nor irreverent, as pure and mere Gavrocherie. Those who did not hesitate, during the lifetime of the man whom they loyally acknowledged as the greatest writer of their century, to express their dissent, in graver or lighter tones of commentary, from such of his views as seemed to them questionable, or such of his theories as seemed to them untenable, have a right to speak—if indeed they are not bound to speak—as plainly and as frankly as they would have spoken in former years with perfect confidence and assured conviction that such plain speaking would not have been taken amiss by the one man who might have felt a right to object to it—had he been himself less straightforward and less upright.

That there are splendid and sonorous verses in this eighth book—that the reader comes upon such verses at every turn—it cannot be necessary to say. But the perpetual, the incessant inspiration which he will recognise in every other province of the poet's work, he will not recognise here: if he fancies that he does, he is misled by the superstition of confidence or infected by the fever of sympathy. The hopeless, ineradicable, inextinguishable superstition which inspires Frenchmen with the faith that what would be damnable in Englishmen or Germans or Italians is divine in Frenchmen was never more nakedly exposed and was never so magni-

ficently expressed. What the French call *chauvinisme*, and the Russo-Radical faction in England was wont to designate by the elegant term of 'jingoism,' is no doubt the obverse of a noble quality: but the untempered vehemence of its expression is apt to alloy the purity and impair the force of poetic style. And I can hardly hope that any more competent critic of our greatest contemporary writer than I can pretend to be would disagree with my diffident and reluctant conclusion that no later work of Victor Hugo's, written on the same lines or in the same temper, can reasonably be set beside the *Châtiments*. The record of *L'Année Terrible*, as I have elsewhere endeavoured to certify at some laborious length, is full of unflagging energy and unfading beauty: but its poetic beauties are fainter and its poetic energies less fervent than those displayed in the former volume of epic and lyric satire. And to me at least I must honestly admit that these posthumous poems of a political or polemical order seem as inferior to the average level of those contained in *L'Année Terrible* as was theirs to that of the hundred which compose the muster of the *Châtiments*. The finest in executive effect is the feeblest in its hold upon history and the faultiest in its relation to fact. That the mock martyrs of Manchester should not have been elevated to the dignity of death by hanging in retribution for homicide—that it would have been wiser to spare their forfeit lives as worthless except to the crew who might make use of their execution as serviceable material in the pinchbeck structure of Hibernian fiction and the pasteboard outworks of Hibernian faction—I have no more doubt now than I had at the time; but I must confess to a conviction that the right word on the matter was not said by Victor Hugo—nor, perhaps, by the humbler voice which anticipated his in appeal

against the sentence which gave to three common homicides the chance of a posthumous position as pseudo-martyrs. The brief and admirable words in which Mr. Bright summed up the reasons against hanging those homicides may not be as unanswerable as they seem to me ; but they are unquestionably weightier and graver than the appeal or the protest put forward by any other pleader in that cause. To some more or less inappropriate extravagance of expression in my own hasty lines on the subject I might not be unwilling to plead guilty ; but I must also plead that Victor Hugo's exceed them hardly more—though that excess be wellnigh beyond all measure of criticism—in poetical value than in political extravagance and in imaginative injustice. Paul de Saint-Victor, in his beautiful and noble book on Victor Hugo, has noted what he disagreed with and disapproved of in the great master's too eager and single-hearted advocacy of every sufferer's cause—for instance, in the course of his merciful and magnanimous pleading on behalf of the ruffians and reptiles of the Commune :. I may perhaps claim an equal right to express my loyal and reverential dissent from what seems to me irrational or inequitable in the expression of his views or the application of his principles.

It might be too much to say that the lyre of this great lyrist would not have suffered by the snapping of this additional or supplementary 'string of brass' ; but I cannot pretend to think it would have suffered much. The raging resolution of the average Frenchman to see nothing so sacred as the immediate advantage or convenience of Frenchmen—nothing hollow in the most sonorous protestations of brotherly unselfishness when illustrated by the most glaring evidence of disloyalty and greed—nothing ludicrous in the

attribution of these qualities to all their well-wishers who do not prefer French claims and French interests to those of their own country—is of all possible national qualities the one most certain to disgust all neutrals and alienate all friends. It is unnecessary for any one, and for me it would hardly be less painful than unseemly, to insist on the too copious evidence of support and encouragement given by the most illustrious of all Frenchmen to the fatally and perversely illogical pretensions of the nation which professes a belief in equality—on the understanding that none of all equally inferior nations is to claim equality with France, and in retributive justice—on condition that Frenchmen are to be exempt from the operation of its plainest laws.

But these, after all, however serious in themselves, are temporary and minor considerations in comparison with the eternal value, the indisputable importance, of an addition to the best creative literature, to the rarest intellectual inheritance, to the highest poetic possessions of the world. And that such an addition has been bequeathed to us by the author of this book will be disputed by no man whose ‘spirit of sense’ is not ‘hard as the palm of ploughman,’ and duller ‘than the fat weed that roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf’ to the perception or apprehension of what is most precious, most perfect, and most enduring in the spiritual world of poetry.



## II

1893

If the accusation of monotony or the charge of repetition brought against the greatest of lyric poets by the lazy malignity of envious dulness is as false and fatuous as it is common and easy, the same charge or accusation when brought against the most careful and conscientious of their commentators and exponents is inevitably more difficult to meet and to refute. At every fresh display of the same great qualities the same emotion must be evoked in any but the most torpid and thankless of imaginable readers ; and the danger is but too obvious that it may not succeed in avoiding the same expression. Reiteration of plaudit and panegyric is more tedious, it may be feared, more wearisome and unwelcome to the average reader or hearer, than reiteration of invective and reviling. And yet, if a great gift is to be acknowledged at all, it can hardly be acknowledged without the common tribute of hackneyed gratitude and threadbare tautologies of praise. When the gift is alike in kind and in quality one with those before bestowed upon us as upon our fathers before us by the same inexhaustible prodigality of genius, we can but accept the legacy and affirm the fact.

The poems chosen by their editors to compose the second and last series of the collection or selection entitled *Toute la Lyre* bear evidence in themselves of dates and moods as various as those comprised in any of the many which have preceded it. But the sign-manual, so to speak, of the same sovereign hand is recognisable—as how should it not be recognisable ?—

on every page. The majestic *Vision of the Mountains* might have found a place in the last series of the *Légende des Siècles* ; the second and the sixth poem following, among the lighter but not less bitter effusions of personal and social satire which relieve the habitually passionate indignation of the author's polemical verse. And the landscapes in the second section must be hung in the chambers of our memory beside those which were first exhibited in the youth and early manhood of the artist.

The glories and the mysteries, the actions and the passions, of nature and of man have attracted and inspired all great poets, from Homer to Hugo and from Virgil to Tennyson, each one according to his birthright, by common sympathy and impulse to various expression of particular experience in feeling and in thought : the mysteries of calculation, ' geometry, algebra, arithmetic,' were hitherto, I imagine, a field unploughed, a sea uncloven, by the share or by the prow of an adventurer in verse. This feat was reserved for the sovereign poet of the nineteenth century. Poets and mathematicians might both have been expected to object to the suggestion of such an attempt : but the former class at all events can only rejoice and wonder over the marvellous and magnificent result :—

Et la science entière apparaît comme un ciel  
Lugubre, sans matière et cependant réel,  
N'acceptant point l'azur et rejetant la terre,  
Ayant pour clef le fait, le nombre pour mystère ;  
L'algèbre y luit ainsi qu'une sombre Vénus ;  
Et de ces absolus et de ces inconnus,  
De ces obscurités terribles, de ces vides,  
Les logarithmes sont les pléiades livides ;  
Et Franklin pâle y jette une clarté d'éclair,  
Et la comète y passe, et se nomme Képler.

Il est deux nuits, deux puits d'aveuglement, deux tables  
 D'obscurité, sans fin, sans forme, épouvantables,  
 L'algèbre, nuit de l'homme, et le ciel, nuit de Dieu ;  
 Les siècles s'useraient à compter, hors du lieu,  
 De l'espace, du temps, invisibles pilastres,  
 Les chiffres dans une ombre et dans l'autre les astres !

A yet more characteristic passage may be cited from the next poem : for the sublimity of emotion is even more characteristic of Hugo's genius than the sublimity of contemplation. And in these verses he has undertaken to describe or to define the true lover of true wisdom :—

Tandis qu'on ne sait quoi d'étrange et de farouche  
 Surgit dans les berceaux, dans les tombeaux se couche,  
 Tandis que l'ouragan souffle, et que par moment  
 La vie universelle est un rugissement,  
 Et qu'à d'autres moments tout n'est plus qu'une face  
 De silence où le cri de l'abîme s'efface,  
 Tandis que le flot roule à l'engloutissement,  
 Que la livide mort court sous le firmament  
 Distribuant le monde aux fléaux ses ministres,  
 Que les astres hagards ont des levers sinistres,  
 Et que tout semble craindre un lugubre abandon,  
 Lui, tranquille, il dit : Paix, harmonie et pardon !

Among so many poems in which the various moods, tender and severe, meditative and passionate, of indignation and aspiration and charity and pity find always their fit and perfect expression, it is difficult to choose any for special comment or typical excerpt where all are so full of plastic life, shapeliness, and colour ; but at least we may be sure that even Victor Hugo never put more pathetic truthfulness into fewer words than these :

Il pleut, c'est la nuit, l'enfant dort.  
 —Enfant, debout ! Va-t'en à ton travail ! C'est l'heure.—  
 Triste, il part ; nul ne le défend,  
 Et le ciel effrayant qui sanglote et qui pleure  
 Glace de ses larmes l'enfant.

There is no better or finer example in Æschylus or in Shakespeare than this of 'the pathetic fallacy'—if a fallacy it be. But it would be a task as tedious and as hopeless as ever was imposed by Venus or any other sorceress upon Psyche or any other victim, to count all the new examples of old power, all the fresh instances of perennial beauty, supplied in these pages for the enjoyment and the bewilderment, the delight and wonder and perplexity of the dazzled judgment which at length is fain to abdicate the right or abjure the privilege of selection. At every turning of the leaf the student comes upon something that should be noticed and that must be treasured; the satire on transatlantic civilisation which proves the writer's affinity rather with such republicans as Landor than with such democrats as Whitman; the bitter good-humour of the lines on the danger of saying even to yourself what you think of this man or that; the wise and lovely verses on the wisdom of lovers and little children; the nobly pathetic and characteristic letter of the first year of the poet's exile; studies of sea and sunset, utterances or effusions of anguish under bereavement and of heroism in hope; and again, studies from fancy or from memory of cynical or sentimental moods or meditations or impressions; the fierce humour of *Love's Blasphemy*, the sharp-edged and serious dramatic fun—a gift bequeathed to the poet's adopted son Auguste Vacquerie—of the delicious little dialogue which determines the choice of a loyal man between his mistress and his friend; and, lastly, the incomparable invitation into the showiest and noisiest booth of the modern fair—literary or dramatic, Norwegian or Parisian.

Mais vous vous rebiffez. C'est vieux jeu, l'idéal !  
On n'en veut plus. Il sied d'offrir pour tout régal  
Le sale et le cruel à la foule effrayée.

In the first series published of this magnificent poetic miscellany it could not but be observed and admitted that the polemical section was hardly up to the mark—at least, by no means up to the mark set by the illustrious writer himself in his earlier works on the same line. It is with even more pleasure than surprise that we must now congratulate the editors on having kept the best wine for the last course or dessert. The noblest poems among those headed *Les Années Funestes* (1852-1870) are worthy of a distinguished place in the deathless volume of 1853. Here is the great and terrible *Death of Saint-Arnaud*,<sup>1</sup> with its matchless and wonderful picture of a fleet under sail for battle:

Le moment vint ; l'escadre appareilla ; les roues  
Tournèrent ; par ce tas de voiles et de proues,  
Dont l'âpre artillerie en vingt salves gronda,  
L'infini se laissa violer. L'armada,  
Formidable, penchant, prête à cracher le soufre,  
Les gueules des canons sur les gueules du gouffre,  
Nageant, polype humain, sur l'abîme béant,  
Et, comme un noir poisson dans un filet géant,  
Prenant l'ouragan sombre en ses mille cordages,  
S'ébranla : dans ses flancs, les haches d'abordages,  
Les sabres, les fusils, le lourd tromblon marin,  
La fauve caronade aux ailerons d'airain,  
Se heurtaient ; et, jetant de l'écume aux étoiles,  
Et roulant dans ses plis des tempêtes de toiles,  
Frégate, aviso, brick, brûlot, trois-ponts, steamer,  
Le troupeau monstrueux couvrit la vaste mer.

It might have tasked and baffled Tintoretto or Veronese to compete with such painting as this on his most triumphant and gigantic canvas.

A fitting companion to this tragic poem is that on the massacre of Mentana. When, some little time after that villainous victory of pope and emperor over the nation which has always had yet more cause to

<sup>1</sup> Not a posthumous or unpublished poem, by the way, as implied if not asserted on the title-page of the volume.

curse the perfidy of France as a friend than even the atrocity of France as an enemy, the present writer had the honour to receive from Victor Hugo a copy of the tiny pamphlet which first gave to the world, in homely small print upon homely thin paper, this immortal gift of impassioned and thunder-bearing song, its cry of prophetic protest, its passion of godlike anger, its music of hope as inexhaustible in sorrow as indomitable as the sea, bore the message they must have borne to thousands of comfort and confirmation in the faith proclaimed and maintained against all reproof of chance or disproof of evidence by 'the voice of Guernsey' in the darkest days of contemporary Europe.

The monotony with which, in a happier hour for us than for themselves, the pressmen of the French empire took courage to reproach its assailant, its denouncer, and its judge, is as various, as vivid, as full of changing life and colour and music, as the many-voiced monotony of the sea. From the days of Homer downward there has been no sweeter, no sublimer or more living picture of dawn than this one taken by a witness whom all the rapture and glory of the hour could not avail to distract from contemplation of the sufferings and the disgraces of the age :—

L'écume à tous les vents s'effare et se déchire  
Et vole, et l'on dirait que de ces flocons blancs  
Quelques-uns prennent vie et sont les goëlands ;  
Le tumulte infini dans l'ombre au loin bégaille ;  
Et la légèreté des nuages égaie  
Toute cette farouche et fauve profondeur ;  
L'aube chantante joue avec le flot grondeur ;  
L'océan frais et pur se fronce aux rocs arides ;  
La jeunesse éternelle offre toutes ses rides ;  
L'innocent liseron, nourri de sel amer,  
Fleurit sous les blocs noirs du vieux mur de la mer ;  
Et la création semble une apothéose ;  
Comme un papillon donne un coup d'aile à la rose,  
Là-bas l'aigle de mer tourne autour du récif.

The fusion rather than contrast of sublimity with sweetness and immensity with grace which gives to the verse of Victor Hugo its special seal and distinctive sign of peculiar inspiration is hardly even here more notable than in a thousand other passages : but where outside his work shall we find the like of it—or the shadow ?

Neither may we look elsewhere for anything like the finished and bitter simplicity of tragic humour which replies to the charge of perpetual repetition through the mouth of the criminal who is weary of hearing brought against him, with such tasteless and intolerant monotony of vehemence, the perpetual, undenied, and undeniable charge of parricide : or like the exquisite and terrible poem on Compiègne, which paints for us in such melodious brilliance not love but crime among the roses : the soft Virgilian eclogue in which tyranny plays on its flute the tune of amnesty : the fiery impeachment of French law, the fearful indictment of French civilisation, humanity, and justice, in the poems on the cases of Rosalie Doise and Lesurque, on the miners of Aubin and the famine in Algeria.

The great closing poem is of a kind above and beyond commentary ; it must be read, re-read, and absorbed before a fit and full sense of its greatness can be adequately realised. The passionate splendour of contemplative indignation which makes of every stanza such a living and vibrating flame of persistent and insistent music as we sometimes are privileged to see and hear in the full charge shoreward of a strong and steady sea can only fail to appeal to the spirit and the sense of such casual trespassers and transgressors as come down to the seaside with a view to indulgence in cockney or in puritan indecencies : and such trespass or transgression is happily less to be feared on the beach of a spiritual than on the beach of a material sea. But

the marvellous, the matchless power of execution can hardly perhaps be appreciated except by practical artists or workers in verse. Execution, as Blake said and says, is the chariot of genius : and here is the very highest genius guiding the horses and swept forward in the chariot of its choice—at once Automedon and Achilles. Here are five hundred and sixty-four deathless lines of five syllables—a metrical form as far removed as any well could be from ordinary association with anything serious or sublime—cast into one hundred and forty-one stanzas of four verses apiece. No more rigid form of metrical oppression could be devised to subdue the soaring genius and provoke the indignant revolt of a Cowley, a Tupper, an Emerson, or a Whitman. There is no sort of effort after such ‘ new music ’ as may be attempted and has often been attained in the music-halls of a ‘ new poetry ’ by the smashing of keys or the snapping of harpstrings, in humble if immodest emulation of such old-world innovators as Fraunce and Stanihurst, who in the age of Spenser and Shakespeare were the songless and earless representatives of that hoariest of impostures so perpetually self-advertised with such immortality of impudence as an artistic novelty or an æsthetic revolution. But there is something which these liberators have somehow failed to attain : there is the sublime liberty of expression, the supreme perfection of utterance, which never has been and never will be attained except by workmen in words (as by workmen in any other more or less plastic material) who can understand, accept, embrace, and rejoice in the rules and the conditions of their art : content in the recognition and happy in the acceptance of that immortal and immutable instinct whose impulse is for law, whose passion is for harmony, and whose service is perfect freedom.



THE WELL  
AT THE WORLD'S END

## THE WELL AT THE WORLD'S END<sup>1</sup>

1896

THE creative gift of Mr. Morris, his distinctive power of imagination, cannot be defined or appreciated by any such test of critical comparison as is applicable to the work of any other man. He is himself alone, and so absolutely that his work can no more be likened to any mediæval than to any contemporary kinsman's. In his love of a story for a story's sake he is akin to Chaucer and the French precursors of Chaucer: but if he has not much of Chaucer's realistic humour and artistic power of condensation and composition, he has a gift of invention as far beyond Chaucer's as the scope of a story like *The Well at the World's End* is beyond the range of such brief romances as *Amis and Amile*, or *Aucassin and Nicolette*. Readers and lovers (the terms should here be synonymous) of his former tales or poems in prose will expect to find in this masterpiece—for a perfect and unique masterpiece it is—something that will remind them less of *Child Christopher* than of *The Wood beyond the World*. The mere likeness in the titles would suggest so much: and this I think they will not fail to find: but I am yet more certain that the quality of this work is even finer and stronger than that of either. The interest, for those who bring with them to the reading of a work of imagination any auxiliary or sympathetic imagination of their own, is deeper and more vivid as well as more various: but the crowning test and triumph of the author's genius will be recognised in the all but unique

<sup>1</sup> *The Well at the World's End*, by William Morris.

power of touching with natural pathos the alien element of magical or supernatural fiction. Coleridge could do this : who else till now has done it ? And when we venture to bring in the unapproachable name of Coleridge, we are venturing to cite the example of the most imaginative, the most essentially poetic, among all poets of all nations and all time.

It should be remembered that when an allegorical intention was detected in the beautiful story of adventure and suffering and love which enchanted all readers in *The Wood beyond the World*, Mr. Morris for once condescended to disclaim the misinterpretation of his meaning, and to point out the difference between allegorical and simple narrative in words of perfect and conclusive accuracy. No commentator, I should hope, will ever waste his time on the childish task of inventing an occult significance for the incidents and adventures, the lurid and the lovely landscapes, set before him and impressed upon his memory in this later and yet more magically beautiful tale. The perfect simplicity and the supreme nobility of the spirit which informs and pervades and quickens and exalts it, must needs make any but an inept and incapable reader feel yet once more a sense of wonder at the stupidity of the generations which could imagine a difference and a contrast between simple and noble. The simplest English writer of our time is also the noblest : and the noblest by reason and by virtue of his sublime simplicity of spirit and of speech. If the English of the future are not utterly unworthy and irredeemably unmindful of the past, they will need no memorial to remind them that his name was William Morris.

THÉOPHILE

## INTRODUCTION

IN the same parcel of papers which contained *Félicien Cossu*<sup>1</sup> and *Ernest Clouët*,<sup>2</sup> we found the ensuing essay, which is of a very different character. Those are burlesques or hoaxes, reviews of books which never existed. The essay entitled *Théophile*,<sup>3</sup> which was doubtless written in the same year, 1862, and probably with the hope that it might be published in the *Spectator*, is a perfectly serious and sincere appreciation of a very interesting French poet of the seventeenth century. It is so carefully written, so eloquent and so judicious, it belongs so characteristically to Swinburne's best period of prose, that we must feel surprise that he never made use of it in succeeding years. It is not unlikely that he forgot having written it; else, when he came to have the *Fortnightly Review* at his disposal, it is strange that he did not expand *Théophile* a little, and send it to Mr. John Morley. At all events, not one of his posthumous works more thoroughly deserves publication.

Théophile de Viau, who is universally known as Théophile, is the type of rebellious young 'libertine' poet, and as such had a particular attraction for Swinburne when he was writing *Poems and Ballads*. But if the elements of the short and bitter life of the author of *Pyrame et Thisbé* fascinated his English follower, Swinburne has shown himself far too good a critic to dwell unduly on these. He does not even follow Gautier, and call Théophile a great poet. His criticism exposes

<sup>1</sup> Privately printed, 1915, 8vo, pp. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Privately printed, 1916, 8vo, pp. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Privately printed, 1915, pp. 35.

what is best in the lyrical work of this negligent and irregular, but tender and genuine writer, who was the friend of Malherbe, but the enemy of his reforms, and who suffered the fate of all ultra-romantic authors at the moment when classical taste revived in the literatures of the Continent.

During the fifty years which followed his death in 1626, no fewer than twenty-two editions of the poems of Théophile de Viau were published in France. Then Boileau ridiculed him, and he fell so completely out of fashion that his very name was forgotten. When Théophile Gautier resuscitated him, in a brilliant essay included in *Les Grotesques* of 1840, he had become so obscure that his new admirer had to tell his readers that if they wanted further particulars about his homonym, they must look out on the book-trays of the parapet of the Pont Neuf for 'un gros volume assez mal imprimé et plein de fautes,' since no modern reprint existed. Nor was this omission rectified by any French scholar until, in 1856, the *Œuvres complètes de Théophile* were published, with a biographical preface, by M. Alleaume, of the École des Chartes. It was in this issue, which occupied two volumes of the delightful Elzevirian Library of that day, that Swinburne made the acquaintance of Théophile. This edition still satisfies his admirers, or did until the publication in 1909 of M. F. Lachèvre's *Le Libertinage devant le Parlement de Paris*, in which the famous lawsuit about the *Parnasse Satirique*, in consequence of which Théophile was sentenced to be burned alive, is given in full, and his works, in the second volume, are reprinted.

EDMUND GOSSE.

## THÉOPHILE

FOR some students of art there is an especial interest in the study of a faded fame. Compassion, curiosity, surprise, all tend to heighten and deepen this interest. We would know what manner of man was this, to have ever been such a radiant figure, to have ever sunk so far out of sight? Apart from his real work as artist or actor in life, his story gains for us a moral meaning, a historical value. Having unearthed such a dead and desecrated glory, the student is but too likely to overrate the worth of his windfall; to praise what none have praised for centuries, for no other or better reason than this. But at times the windfall is a godsend; and few pleasures are purer than that of finding and sharing a hidden or contemned feature.

As to the poet of whom I have now to speak there can be little doubt or debate. Critics without ear or eye for the simply lyrical qualities of verse, will cast him over at once; his faults and shortcomings leap to light at a glance. As readily will others recognise in his hand this one pearl of great price. Among the whole race of French lyric poets, Théophile has a place from which he cannot be ousted even by his own fault. One critic only (himself, by admission of our greatest poet, a great poet) has done due honour to this unfortunate. His illustrious namesake, Théophile Gautier, opens the matter in an emphatic and incisive way: 'We have now to do with a real great poet.' This should console the spirit of Théophile I., for the general verdict of mere students, who resume and

dismiss his claims much after this fashion : ' A singular figure, a typical man of his time, not without distinctive character and loose energy ; deserving a niche in social history, but rather by accident than merit ; a casual landmark or tidemark, indicating, as it happens, the momentary tendencies of feeling and of faith ; but not of himself noticeable, nor competent to stand for long on a footing of his own.' Such upon the whole is the ultimate verdict of his last editor : that his present critic thinks otherwise will be manifest enough. It is true that an extraneous and casual interest is attracted to the man's name by the accidents of his actual life ; his war with society and religion, his persecution by the Church and by the law, his hapless position as a born Huguenot, nominal Papist, and natural Pagan ; his swift and shining career as soldier and scholar ; his transient official dignity as the supreme libertine and perfect poet of his time ; his growth, his consummation, and his collapse. But were this all, I for my part should have left him in the dust of dead libraries. To me he seems worthy of remembrance and of distinction for one reason only ; that the work he did, at its best, was and is and will be admirable for its positive and actual beauty of form.

Théophile de Viau was born at Clairac in 1590.<sup>1</sup> His father was a poor Huguenot gentleman, thrown out of his work as a barrister by the civil wars, and living on a small manor of his own at Boussières-Sainte-Radegonde. His grandfather, says M. Alleaume, had been ' secretary to the Queen of Navarre ' ; I suppose to Jeanne d'Albret : her daughter-in-law ' Queen Madge ' would have been a fitter patroness for the grandson. As usual, the verse of Théophile retains

<sup>1</sup> More exactly, 1591.



here and there some savour of his native scenery, shows now and then some influence of his native air. In his light loose manner, he talks rather tenderly and regretfully of the little memorial tower, the dim fertile valleys where a motherly Nature is always provident of pasture, the 'clear, sparkling, delicate, fresh wine' luckily brought forth on the lean and rocky soil of hill adjacent, where his brothers and he might have lived in quiet and merrily enough, 'sans seigneur ni vassal.' But neither for him nor for his only brother of whom we have any record was a life of that sort designed by Providence or fate.

He was put to school, it seems, first under Scotch teachers, and then under his lifelong enemies the Jesuits, to the surprise it appears of M. Alleaume; by no means to mine. There is no evidence that the father was a fanatic pietist, though his son Paul de Viau lived and died as a Huguenot soldier; and in that time of war and persecution there may well have been no other means of training at hand. As to the result of such training—the implacable antagonism on either side, scorn and anger on this hand, fear and fury on that—it will scarcely seem wonderful to those who remember that among the noticeable pupils of the Company of Jesus there are registered the names of François-Marie Arouet and Denis Diderot.

The first mishap of Théophile was the acquaintance of Jean-Louis Guez, the son of a lackey, and himself a lackey of the vilest kind, servile and mutinous by turns or at once; then little known, afterwards under the name of Balzac as famous for prose as Malherbe for verse, and equally forgettable. With him, Théophile at twenty-two made an excursion into the Netherlands, which ended in a rupture of their incongruous alliance. The poet returned by himself to Paris, and

there won favour and fame perhaps too soon and too easily for his welfare. He had more than enough of bright, rapid talent, more of impulse than of patience, and a too intermittent sense and relish of the right. Born a poet with true and rare qualities, he was content when his verses came naturally right, and content also when they naturally went wrong. In early youth, on his own showing, he lived hard and fast, in the company of older men than himself ; and escaped, if indeed he did escape, from a way of life which might have destroyed or impaired his native gift, by want of money and other cross accidents of fortune. A beautiful passage of prose tells us in his own words with what a large and fresh delight he received and embraced all natural beauty. ' One should have a passion not for good men and beautiful women alone, but for every kind of beautiful thing. I love fair weather, clean watersprings, the view of mountains, the stretch of a broad plain, noble woodlands ; the sea, its billows, its calms, its beaches ; I love, too, all that more especially touches on the senses—music, flowers, fine raiment, fine horses, good smells, good cheer ; but my desire takes hold on all these things only to please itself, and by no means to exert and worry itself ; when any one of these pastimes takes entire possession of a soul, it is no longer an affection or a liking, but an insane, brutish mood of mind.' There is something like Keats in the breadth and frankness of this general enjoyment and susceptible vivacity of sense ; but there is a clear air of health, which Keats has not ; a greater poet is visible in his letters, and a sicklier man. Théophile is robust and spontaneous, untroubled from within, with no respect for inward troubles. He goes on to say that he never let love hurt him much, or found it hard to dispense with the unattainable ; and

as to his favourite pleasures, he can enjoy study and good cheer without drinking himself drunk or reading himself stupid, though this may sometimes fatigue him and that has often exhilarated. It is certain at least that he lost no time in earning a great name on one hand and a bad name on the other. He lived and thought like other free thinkers and free livers, but spoke and wrote better and more boldly than his friends. He had also, as I conjecture, a touch of Byronic ambition to be thought an eminent and terrible enemy to the decorous life and respectable fashion of the world ; and as in Byron's case there was mingled with a sincere scorn and horror of hypocrisy a boyish and voluble affectation of audacity and excess, as Marcius fluttered the Volscians in Corioli they would flutter the Philistines in Gath. But in Byron there was a cross of uneasy, of almost histrionic pretension. Théophile has a more genuine humour and more of a boy's naughtiness than a man's vice ; he breaks bounds and speaks out in school for the fun's sake ; and the rod was not spared, when once he fell into the holy hands of the teachers of men.

In the mass of occasional verse which he wrote about this time there are many stanzas and some entire lyrics of the brightest and sweetest beauty, fragrant and radiant with youth and life. There is a light and breath about them as of sunny and dewy woodland, a music of blowing leaves and walking birds. All the perfect and simple charm of the old French lyrists appears once more on the eve of a long eclipse—that ' twilight of the gods ' which was to last even to the time of our own fathers, then only to dissolve and break up before the splendid sunrise of a greater than the poets of old. All play of colour and imagination, all lyric melody and variety, fled before its ghastly

advent from academic shades. 'Enfin Malherbe vint'; and after him his son Boileau, a somewhat reduced and curtailed child of song, of whom rumour plausibly affirmed that a turkey-cock had left him at three years old converted for life into—a critic. Oxen and cobs occupied the stalls and browsed on the pastures of poetic fame. A spiritual progeny at least was permitted to the laureate of Louis XIV.; the *Ode on the Siege of Namur*, memorable as probably the very vilest of all known or possible odes brought forth after its kind; and the 'porter of Parnassus' set his brand in a single couplet at once on Théophile and on Tasso. More glorious than ever in all things else, France let fall her chaplet of lyric fame; the land of Villon, of Ronsard, of Belleau, of so many other noble and exquisite poets, forgot that there was ever such a thing as poetry pure and simple. Great dramatists and great humorists she had, among the greatest of all times; but no one who could simply sing a song; no lyrical verse which was serious, spontaneous, perfect, any more. And the three great poets of her academic age were rather in it than of it; each in his own way, Corneille, Molière, La Fontaine, had a savour of the earlier stock, a relish of the old strong race of speakers and singers; a large eloquence, a wide-eyed wisdom, a liberal humour, a confidence of strength, ease of breath, grace of gait, which were not of their time; the childlike and godlike qualities of young and unenslaved manhood, of genius free to receive and able to return.

The faults and errors of Théophile's verse are of those that spring at once to sight, visible to the blindest and rebukable by the dullest of reviewers. He is often verbose, fantastic, tasteless; so idle and impatient as to admit the feeblest and windiest verses into a poem

that a little care or a little sense would have left equable and vigorous. Much of his work can hardly be read without something (if not much) of weariness and irritation. There is a rank and barren overgrowth of weeds, a jungle of rotting underwood and leafless briar, hard by the parks and rose-gardens of his poetic estate. As in the Italian and the English poetry of his day, the vices of the *seicentisti* are rampant and flagrant in his verse. It is difficult, but it is only just to remember that there have since been worse leaders than Marino and worse schools than the school of his disciples. The 'sweet-spoken' poet of Adonis, who won this epithet of praise from the youth of Milton, had bewitched and transformed all singers with his Circean honey; but honey at least it was that he mixed with the pure draught of song, not a potion of wormwood and service, the bitter and abortive drug of the medicine-men who succeeded. He hung with gauds and tinsel the statue of Apollo, plaited and perfumed the Muse's hair, and clipt the laurel into likeness of bird or beast; but he did not break down or shave close or root up. Among his followers, or at least among the poets influenced by the fashion he helped to set and the taste he helped to spread, Théophile in France and Crashaw in England had many merits and faults in common with him and with each other. Crashaw is a Christianised Théophile, steeped in Catholic sentiment and deformed by fantastic devotion; he is a far smaller figure, a much weaker and perverser man; but in fancy and melody, in grace and charm of exquisite words and notes, he may rank next and near him. He is far more ingenious and elaborate; if elaboration and ingenuity be qualities commendable in a poet. His studies are far more fleshless and formless; if it be praiseworthy in an artist to work after a bodiless and intangible

design. I must add that Théophile's bad taste—bad enough at its worst, in (and beyond) all conscience—is less monstrous, less violent, less excessive than his religious rival's. Again, Crashaw has now and then touched a chord of music too rich and deep for any other hand trained in the same school; very rarely, but very surely, he has done this. Nevertheless, after all deductions and allowances possible have been made, Théophile stands forth as by far the greater man, the sounder, larger, more free, and more fruitful genius. His faults are the faults of over-careless health, Crashaw's the faults of over-studious disease. His personal career and character, setting aside his achieved or attempted works, are fuller, perhaps, of interest than almost any poet's on record.

In his early love-songs, and especially in the shortest of these, where he has not room to overflow or time to stagnate, Théophile shows to most advantage. These poems have a colour and a flavour of their own, a beauty neither imitated nor imitable. They are delicately ardent, and fancifully earnest: they have touches and tones of the tenderest and finest harmony. They have not perhaps much depth of heat, but they have no play of artificial fire; what they show of flame, if not durable, is sincere. He does not assume or affect, deprecate or distort, anything: his verse reflects the beauty of things steeped in the light and colour of his own enjoyment. Especially in his exquisite ode *La Solitude*, the passionate and the pictorial sides are alike for harmony and perfection. The poem opens with quiet low notes, with a reserve which leaves room for growth; it plays at first, with the light motion of a fresh and growing flame, about faint fancies and memories, touching here a chord and rousing there an echo of old music; full of bright fugitive conceits

and the pretty quasi-classic decorations of the age. Slight and facile as are the touches of landscape, they catch and pass on the true effect of the natural thing. The grace and charm of this overture cannot be shown by fragments ; this line and that have a separate beauty of their own, but the more exquisite elements which compose the general beauty are not separable. The dim ravine framed in by trees, the remote water which serves for mirror to the wild deer, the vast oak, ' almost as old as the sun,' the quiet, chill twilight under the boughs and the noise of winds overhead that beat about the upper branches ' with an amorous violence,' all sights and sounds of the solitude are full of living symbols and old-world stories. Thus the way is prepared and swept clear for the feet of lovers ; and then only the figure of human beauty, the presence of human sentiment, is admitted or perceived. Then from tender and fanciful description, from invocation of nature and invitation of love, the poem passes into the most glad, the most delicate rapture :—

O beauté sans doute immortelle,  
Où les Dieux trouvent des appas,  
*Par vos yeux je ne croyois pas*  
*Que vous fussiez du tout si belle !*

What earlier or later lover or poet has ever put into simpler words a sweeter saying, more human and puerile and divine ? And how excellent is the natural and sudden effusion of the mere verse, as of blowing foliage or bubbling water :—

Que son teint est de bonne grâce !  
Qu'il est blanc, et qu'il est vermeil !  
Il est plus net que le soleil  
Et plus uny que de la glace.

Mon Dieu ! que tes cheveux me plaisent !  
 Ils s'esbattent dessus ton front,  
*Et, les voyant beaux comme ils sont,*  
*Je suis jaloux quand ils se baisent.*

*Belle bouche d'ambre et de rose,*  
*Ton entretien est déplaisant,*  
*Si tu ne dis, en me baisant,*  
*Qu'aimer est une belle chose.*

If in all love-songs written since the time of the Canticles there is anything more beautiful—I had well-nigh written, as beautiful—I have never fallen in with it. This is past praise ; it touches one's sense of beauty wellnigh into tears, of pleasure ; it has in it a sheathed sting of that tender and intense delight which only verse and music, painting and sculpture, can give in full, as by some infection of contagious heaven ; the delight which natural beauty gives, and something more ; something thrown in, as it were, over and above that simple and common rapture ; something which makes lovable which before was only lovely ; no extraneous or discordant element of pleasure, but a sublimation of what was already a spiritual emotion filling and transfiguring the fleshly body of the day's delight. Of all who can feel or fancy or describe, how many can fuse together these qualities or powers into such form or touch them with such colour ? and what can be plainer, what easier than the manner of the verse ?

Vois-tu ce tronc et cette pierre ?  
 Je croy qu'ils prennent garde à nous,  
 Et mon amour devient jaloux  
 De ce myrthe et de ce lierre.

Sus, ma Corine ! que je cueille  
 Tes baisers du matin au soir !  
 Voy comment, pour nous faire asseoir,  
 Ce myrthe a laissé choir sa fucille.



Oy le pinçon et la linotte,  
Sur la branche de ce rosier ;  
Voy bransler leur petit gosier !  
Oy comme ils ont changé de notte !

Approche, approche, ma Dryade,  
Icy murmureront les eaux ;  
Icy les amoureux oyseaux  
Chanteront une sérénade.

Preste-moi ton sein pour y boire  
Des odeurs qui m'embaumeront ;  
Ainsi mes sens se pasmeront  
Dans le lacs de tes bras d'yvoire.

Je baigneray mes mains folastres  
Dans les ondes de tes cheveux,  
Et ta beauté prendra les vœux  
De mes œillades idolastres.

Ne crains rien, Cupidon nous garde.  
Mon petit Ange, es-tu pas mien ?  
Ha ! je vois que tu m'aymes bien ;  
Tu rougis quand je te regarde.

Ma Corine, que je t'embrasse !  
Personne ne nous voit qu'Amour ;  
Voy que mesme les yeux du jour  
Ne trouvent point icy de place.

Les vents, qui ne se peuvent taire,  
Ne peuvent escouter aussy,  
Et ce que nous ferons icy  
Leur est un incognu mystère.

These are but samples broken off from the poem, which throughout is a noble model of natural beauty and fantastic so intermingled, that neither clashes nor obtrudes, while each catches from the other new colour and harmony. No reader will wonder now at the deep and sincere contempt of the critical school for this poet.

The arch-academician—thanks to nature and to

accidents, 'très peu voluptueux,' and not having the 'fierce affections' avowed by Mardian—could not but rise to sublimity of scorn at the thought of a 'fool of quality' capable of admiration for Théophile in an age which sat at the feet of Boileau. When Keats fired back a stray shot at that unreverable shade, tricked in phantasmal powder and immaterial peruke, he knew not it was an elder brother's wrong that he avenged, and a brother's in whom the family likeness is curiously clear.

Another good sample of these rare qualities is the poem on a lover watching the waking and the sleep of his mistress; fervent, fluent, simple, with a touch of fancy and a love of passion equally gracious and earnest:—

Quand tu me vois baiser tes bras,  
Que tu poses nuds sur tes draps,  
Bien plus blancs que le linge mesme ;  
Quand tu sens ma bruslante main  
Se pourmener dessus ton sein,  
Tu sens bien, Cloris, que je t'aime.

Comme un dévot devers les Cieux,  
Mes yeux tournez devers tes yeux,  
À genoux auprès de ta couche,  
Pressé de mille ardans désirs,  
*Je laisse sans ouvrir ma bouche  
Avec toy dormir mes plaisirs.*

Le sommeil, aise de t'avoir,  
Empesche tes yeux de me voir,  
Et te retient dans son empire  
Avec si peu de liberté,  
Que ton esprit tout arrêté  
Ne murmure ni ne respire.

La rose en rendant son odeur,  
Le soleil donnant son ardeur,  
Diane et le char qui la traîne,  
Une Nayade dedans l'eau,  
Et les Grâces dans un tableau,  
Font plus de bruict que ton haleine.

Là, je souspire auprès de toy,  
Et, considérant comme quoy  
Ton œil si doucement repose,  
Je m'escrie : O Ciel ! peux-tu bien  
Tirer d'une si belle chose  
Un si cruel mal que le mien !

Observe the perfect quiet and ease with which the poem is wound up—the absence of any forced or studied climax, of all elaborated point or smooth artificial glitter. It goes out musically and in peace, having lasted its time ; there is no violence, no constraint, no obtrusion ; the fall of the verse is gentle and sufficing. In all the better pieces of Théophile's handiwork this simplicity and fluency of subsiding verse marks the winding up of the strain. This poem, by its qualities of music, ardour, ease, and by a certain passionate grace of words, recalls Alfred de Musset ; but Théophile has nothing of his hectic modern morbidity of colour and spirit. The penultimate stanza is as a rain of flowers upon flowers flung over the sleeper's face in a freak of the waiting Loves. ' Her breath makes less sound than a rose makes in giving out its odour, the sun in shedding his light, the motion of the charioted moon in heaven, a Naiad in the water, or the Graces in a picture ' ; can fancy be more bright and sweet, more fresh and unforced than these ?

The verses *Pour Mademoiselle de M.*, unequal in parts and monotonous, open with words and cadences, full of the simple and sincere grace which we have before noted :—

Je suis bien jeune encor, et la beauté que j'ayme  
Est jeune comme moy.  
J'ay souvent désiré de luy parler moy-mesme  
Pour luy donner ma foy.

Lors que l'aube, en suivant la nuit qu'elle a chassée,  
     Espart ses tresses d'or,  
 Le premier mouvement qui vient à ma pensée,  
     C'est l'amour d'Alidor.  
 Je tasche en m'éveillant de rappeler les songes  
     Que j'ay faicts en dormant,  
 Et dans le souvenir de leurs plaisans mensonges,  
     Je revoy mon amant.  
 Mon esprit amoureux n'est point sans violence  
     Au milieu du repos ;  
 Je le voy dans la nuit, et parmy le silence  
     J'entends ses doux propos.  
 Tous les secrets d'amour que le sommeil exprime,  
     Mon âme les ressent,  
 Et le matin je pense avoir commis un crime  
     Dans mon lit innocent.

A deeper note of passion vibrates in some of these poems, as here :—

Pleust au Ciel qu'aujourd'huy la terre eust quitté l'onde,  
     Que les raiz du Soleil fussent absens des Cieux,  
 Que tous les élémens eussent quitté le monde,  
     Et que je n'eusse point abandonné vos yeux.

Que ta fidélité se ferme à mon exemple ;  
     Fuy comme moy la presse, hay comme moy la Cour ;  
 Ne fréquente jamais bal, promenoir, ny temple,  
     Et que nos deytez ne soyent rien que l'Amour.

Tout seul dedans ma chambre, où j'ay faict mon Église,  
     Ton image est mon Dieu, mes passions ma foy ;  
 Si pour me divertir Amour veut que je lise,  
     Ce sont vers que luy-mesme a composé pour moy.

Dans le trouble importun des soucis de la guerre,  
     Chacun me voit chagrin, car il semble, à me voir,  
 Que je fais des projets pour conquérir la terre,  
     Et mes plus hauts desseins ne sont que de t'avoir.

The *Ode on Morning* is a study of the simplest colour and sound, full of delicate and effective detail. Images of common things within doors and without are as

carefully grouped and gathered as in any work of the modern school. The whole brief poem must be run through if its excellence is to be felt. Poets have often enough described the rising of the sun's steeds from the sea, when they rear their manes above the foam, ' *lucemque elatis naribus efflant* ' ; never has the old symbol been more nobly given :—

Ses chevaux, au sortir de l'onde,  
De flamme et de clarté couverts,  
La bouche et les naseaux ouverts,  
Ronflent la lumière du monde.

La lune fuit devant nos yeux ;  
La nuit a retiré ses voiles ;  
Peu à peu le front des estoilles  
S'unit à la couleur des cieux.

Compare with these Marlowe's horses of the sun—

that guide the golden eye of heaven  
And blow the morning from their nostrils.

After the grand grotesque of the last line this delicate picture of dawn with its growth of pure pale colour and widening light comes with a softer effect.

No touch of nature, such as we are used to think a specially modern quality in verse, is passed over as too slight :—

Déjà la diligente avette  
Boit la marjolaine et le thym ;

lambs bound over new-born grass ; birds worship with sudden song the light that turns nest and plumage to gold ; the waking lover looks round after the shadow he was kissing in a dream, and weeps :—

Sa mère, qui luy fait la tasche,  
Presse le chanvre qu'elle attache  
À sa quenouille de roseau :

light and sound break up the silence and the shade ;  
the blacksmith's forge reddens and rings ; a sunbeam  
striking through the door effaces the last faint candle :

Il est jour ; levons-nous, Philis !  
Allons à nostre jardinage  
Voir s'il est, comme ton visage,  
Semé de roses et de lys.

No poet used the worn old conventional images of  
verse with more tact to better purpose ; he freshens  
and brightens these brown dead leaves with rain and  
sunshine of his own.

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

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## CHARLES BAUDELAIRE<sup>1</sup>

1861

It is now some time since France has turned out any new poet of very high note or importance ; the graceful, slight, and somewhat thin-spun classical work of M. Théodore de Banville hardly carries weight enough to tell across the Channel ; indeed, the best of this writer's books, in spite of exquisite humorous character and a most flexible and brilliant style, is too thoroughly Parisian to bear transplanting at all. French poetry of the present date, taken at its highest, is not less effectually hampered by tradition and the taste of the greater number of readers than our own is. A French poet is expected to believe in philanthropy, and break off on occasion in the middle of his proper work to lend a shove forward to some theory of progress. The critical students there, as well as here, judging by the books they praise and the advice they proffer, seem to have pretty well forgotten that a poet's business is presumably to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society. No other form of art is so pestered with this impotent appetite for meddling in quite extraneous matters ; but the mass of readers seem actually to think that a poem is the better for containing a moral lesson or assisting in a tangible and material good work. The courage and sense of a man who at such a time ventures to profess and act on the conviction that the art of poetry has absolutely nothing to do with didactic matter at all,

<sup>1</sup> *Les Fleurs du Mal*, par Charles Baudelaire. Édition augmentée de beaucoup de poèmes, et diminuée de six pièces. 1861.



are proof enough of the wise and serious manner in which he is likely to handle the materials of his art. From a critic who has put forward the just and sane view of this matter with a consistent eloquence, one may well expect to get as perfect and careful poetry as he can give.

To some English readers the name of M. Baudelaire may be known rather through his admirable translations, and the criticisms on American and English writers appended to these, and framing them in fit and sufficient commentary, than by his volume of poems, which, perhaps, has hardly yet had time to make its way among us. That it will in the long run fail of its meed of admiration, whether here or in France, we do not believe. Impeded at starting by a foolish and shameless prosecution, the first edition was, it appears, withdrawn before anything like a fair hearing had been obtained for it. The book now comes before us with a few of the original poems cancelled, but with important additions. Such as it now is, to sum up the merit and meaning of it is not easy to do in a few sentences. Like all good books, and all work of any original savour and strength, it will be long a debated point of argument, vehemently impugned and eagerly upheld.

We believe that M. Baudelaire's first publications were his essays on the contemporary art of France, written now many years since.<sup>1</sup> In these early writings there is already such admirable judgment, vigour of thought and style, and appreciative devotion to the subject, that the worth of his own future work in art might have been foretold even then. He has more delicate power of verse than almost any man living, after Victor Hugo, Browning, and (in his lyrics) Tenny-

<sup>1</sup> Salon de 1845 (1845) ; Salon de 1846 (1846). [ED.]

son. The sound of his metres suggests colour and perfume. His perfect workmanship makes every subject admirable and respectable. Throughout the chief part of this book he has chosen to dwell mainly upon sad and strange things—the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure—the perverse happiness and wayward sorrows of exceptional people. It has the languid, lurid beauty of close and threatening weather—a heavy, heated temperature, with dangerous hothouse scents in it ; thick shadow of cloud about it, and fire of molten light. It is quite clear of all whining and windy lamentation ; there is nothing of the bubbling and shrieking style long since exploded. The writer delights in problems, and has a natural leaning to obscure and sorrowful things. Failure and sorrow, next to physical beauty and perfection of sound or scent, seem to have an infinite attraction for him. In some points he resembles Keats, or still more his chosen favourite among modern poets, Edgar Poe ; at times, too, his manner of thought has a relish of Marlowe, and even the sincerer side of Byron. From Théophile Gautier, to whom the book is dedicated, he has caught the habit of a faultless and studious simplicity ; but, indeed, it seems merely natural to him always to use the right word and the right rhyme. How supremely musical and flexible a perfect artist in writing can make the French language, any chance page of the book is enough to prove ; every description, the slightest and shortest even, has a special mark on it of the writer's keen and peculiar power. The style is sensuous and weighty ; the sights seen are steeped most often in sad light and sullen colour.

As instances of M. Baudelaire's strength and beauty of manner, one might take especially the poems headed *Le Masque*, *Parfum Exotique*, *La Chevelure*, *Les Sept*

*Vieillards, Les Petites Vieilles, Brumes et Pluies*; of his perfect mastery in description, and sharp individual drawing of character and form, the following stray verses plucked out at random may stand for a specimen:—

Sur ta chevelure profonde  
 Aux âcres parfums,  
 Mer odorante et vagabonde  
 Aux flots bleus et bruns,  
 Comme un navire qui s'éveille  
 Au vent du matin,  
 Mon âme rêveuse appareille  
 Pour un ciel lointain.  
 Tes yeux où rien ne se révèle  
 De doux ni d'amer,  
 Sont deux bijoux froids où se mêle  
 L'or avec le fer.

Et ton corps se penche et s'allonge  
 Comme un fin vaisseau  
 Qui roule bord sur bord et plonge  
 Ses vergues dans l'eau.

The whole poem<sup>1</sup> is worth study for its vigorous beauty and the careful facility of its expression. Perhaps, though, the sonnet headed *Causerie* is a still completer specimen of the author's power. The way in which the sound and sense are suddenly broken off and shifted, four lines from the end, is wonderful for effect and success. M. Baudelaire's mastery of the sonnet-form is worth remarking as a test of his natural bias towards such forms of verse as are most nearly capable of perfection. In a book of this sort, such a leaning of the writer's mind is almost necessary. The matters treated of will bear no rough or hasty handling. Only supreme excellence of words will suffice to grapple with and fitly render the effects of such material. Not the luxuries of pleasure in their simple first form, but

<sup>1</sup> *Le Serpent qui danse.* [Ed.]

the sharp and cruel enjoyments of pain, the acrid relish of suffering felt or inflicted, the sides on which nature looks unnatural, go to make up the stuff and substance of this poetry. Very good material they make, too ; but evidently such things are unfit for rapid or careless treatment. The main charm of the book is, upon the whole, that nothing is wrongly given, nothing capable of being re-written or improved on its own ground. Concede the starting point, and you cannot have a better runner.

Thus, even of the loathsomest bodily putrescence and decay he can make some noble use ; pluck out its meaning and secret, even its beauty, in a certain way, from actual carrion ; as here, of the flies bred in a carcase :—

Tout cela descendait, montait comme une vague,  
Ou s'élançait en pétillant ;  
On eût dit que le corps, enflé d'un souffle vague,  
Vivait en se multipliant.

Et ce monde rendait une étrange musique,  
Comme l'eau courante et le vent,  
Ou le grain qu'un vanneur d'un mouvement rythmique  
Agite et tourne dans son van.

Another of this poet's noblest sonnets is that *À une Passante*, comparable with a similar one of Keats, *Time's sea hath been five years at its slow ebb*, but superior for directness of point and forcible reality. Here for once the beauty of a poem is rather passionate than sensuous. Compare the delicate emblematic manner in which Keats winds up his sonnet with this sharp perfect finale :—

Fugitive beauté  
Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,  
Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité ?  
Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici, trop tard ! *jamais* peut-être !  
Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sais où je vais,  
O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais !

There is noticeable also in M. Baudelaire's work a quality of *drawing* which recalls the exquisite power in the same way of great French artists now living. His studies are admirable for truth and grace ; his figure-painting has the ease and strength, the trained skill, the beautiful gentle justice of manner, which come out in such pictures as *La Source* of Ingres, or that other splendid study of Flandrin, of a curled-up naked figure under full soft hot light, now exhibiting here. These verses of Baudelaire's are as perfect and good as either :—

Tes sourcils méchants  
Te donnent un air étrange,  
Qui n'est pas celui d'un ange,  
Sorcière aux yeux alléchants.

Sur ta chair le parfum rôde  
Comme autour d'un encensoir ;  
Tu charmes comme le soir,  
Nymphé ténébreuse et chaude.

Le désert et la forêt  
Embaument tes tresses rudes ;  
Ta tête a les attitudes  
De l'énigme et du secret ;

Tes hanches sont amoureuses  
De ton dos et de tes seins,  
Et tu ravis les coussins  
Par tes poses langoureuses.

Nothing can beat that as a piece of beautiful drawing. It may be worth while to say something of the moral and meaning of many among these poems. Certain critics, who will insist on going into this matter, each man as deep as his small leaden plummet will reach, have discovered what they call a paganism on the spiritual side of the author's tone of thought. Stripped

of its coating of jargon, this may mean that the poet spoken of endeavours to look at most things with the eye of an old-world poet ; that he aims at regaining the clear and simple view of writers content to believe in the beauty of material subjects. To us, if this were the meaning of these people, we must say it seems a foolish one ; for there is not one of these poems that could have been written in a time when it was not the fashion to dig for moral motives and conscious reasons. Poe, for example, has written poems without any moral meaning at all ; there is not one poem of the *Fleurs du Mal* which has not a distinct and vivid background of morality to it. Only, this moral side of the book is not thrust forward in the foolish and repulsive manner of a half-taught artist ; the background, as we called it, is not out of drawing.

If any reader could extract from any poem a positive spiritual medicine—if he could swallow a sonnet like a moral prescription—then clearly the poet supplying these intellectual drugs would be a bad artist ; indeed, no real artist, but a huckster and vendor of miscellaneous wares. But those who will look for them may find moralities in plenty behind every poem of M. Baudelaire's ; such poems especially as *Une Martyre*. Like a mediæval preacher, when he has drawn the heathen love, he puts sin on its right hand, and death on its left. It is not his or any artist's business to warn against evil ; but certainly he does not exhort to it, knowing well enough that the one fault is as great as the other.

But into all this we do not advise any one to enter who can possibly keep out of it. When a book has been so violently debated over, so hauled this way and that by contentious critics, the one intent on finding that it means something mischievous, and the other

intent on finding that it means something useful, those who are in search neither of a poisonous compound nor of a cathartic drug had better leave the disputants alone, or take only such notice of them as he absolutely must take. Allegory is the dullest game and the most profitless taskwork imaginable : but if so minded a reader might extract most elaborate meanings between the Muse of the writer and that strange figure of a beautiful body with the head severed, laid apart

Sur la table de nuit comme une renoncule.

The heavy ' mass of dark mane and heaps of precious jewels ' might mean the glorious style and decorative language clothing this poetry of strange disease and sin ; the hideous violence wrought by a shameless and senseless love might stand as an emblem of that analysis of things monstrous and sorrowful, which stamps the whole book with its special character. Then again, the divorce between all aspiration and its results might be here once more given in type ; the old question re-handled—

What hand and brain went ever paired ?  
What heart alike conceived and dared ?—

and the sorrowful final divorce of will from deed accomplished at last by force ; and the whole thing summed up in that noble last stanza :—

Ton époux court le monde, et ta forme immortelle  
Veille près de lui quand il dort ;  
Autant que toi sans doute il te sera fidèle,  
Et constant jusques à la mort.

All this and more might be worked out if the reader cared to try ; but we hope he would not. The poem is quite beautiful and valuable enough as merely the ' design of an unknown master.' In the same way one

might use up half the poems in the book ; for instance, those three beautiful studies of cats (fitly placed in a book that has altogether a feline style of beauty—subtle, luxurious, with sheathed claws) ; or such carefully tender sketches as *Le Beau Navire* ; or that Latin hymn ‘Franciscæ meæ laudes’ :—

Novis te cantabo chordis,  
O novelletum quod ludis  
In solitudine cordis.

Esto sertis implicata,  
O fœmina delicata  
Per quam solvuntur peccata !

Some few indeed, as that *ex-voto* poem *À une Madone*, appeal at once to the reader as to an interpreter ; they are distinctly of a mystical moral turn, and in that rich symbolic manner almost unsurpassable for beauty :—

Avec mes Vers polis, treillis d'un pur métal  
Savamment constellé de rimes de cristal,  
Je ferai pour ta tête une énorme Couronne ;  
Et dans ma Jalousie, ô mortelle Madone,  
Je saurai te tailler un Manteau, de façon  
Barbare, roide et lourd, et doublé de soupçon,  
Qui comme une guérite enfermera tes charmes ;  
Non de Perles brodé, mais de toutes mes Larmes !  
Ta Robe, ce sera mon Désir, frémissant,  
Onduleux, mon Désir qui monte et qui descend,  
Aux pointes se balance, aux vallons se repose,  
Et revêt d'un baiser tout ton corps blanc et rose.

Before passing on to the last poem we wish to indicate for especial remark, we may note a few others in which this singular strength of finished writing is most evident. Such are, for instance, *Le Cygne*, *Le Poison*, *Tristesses de la Lune*, *Remords Posthume*, *Le Flacon*, *Ciel Brouillé*, *Une Mendiante Rousse* (a simpler study than usual, of great beauty in all ways, noticeable for



its revival of the old fashion of unmixed masculine rhymes), *Le Balcon*, *Allégorie*, *L'Amour et le Crâne*, and the two splendid sonnets marked xxvii. and xlii. We cite these headings in no sort of order, merely as they catch one's eye in revising the list of contents and recall the poems classed there. Each of them we regard as worth a separate study, but the *Litanies de Satan*, as in a way the keynote to this whole complicated tune of poems, we had set aside for the last, much as (to judge by its place in the book) the author himself seems to have done.

Here it seems as if all failure and sorrow on earth, and all the cast-out things of the world—ruined bodies and souls diseased—made their appeal, in default of help, to Him in whom all sorrow and all failure were incarnate. As a poem, it is one of the noblest lyrics ever written; the sound of it between wailing and triumph, as it were the blast blown by the trumpets of a brave army in irretrievable retreat:—

O toi qui de la Mort, ta vieille et forte amante,  
Engendras l'Espérance—une folle charmante !  
O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui fais au proscrit ce regard calme et haut  
Qui damne tout un peuple autour d'un échafaud,  
O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

Toi qui, magiquement, assouplis les vieux os  
De l'ivrogne attardé foulé par les chevaux,  
O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !  
Toi qui, pour consoler l'homme frêle qui souffre,  
Nous appris à mêler le salpêtre et le soufre,  
O Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère !

These lines are not given as more finished than the rest; every verse has the vibration in it of naturally sound and pure metal. It is a study of metrical

cadence throughout, of wonderful force and variety. Perhaps it may be best, without further attempts to praise or to explain the book, here to leave off, with its stately and passionate music fresh in our ears. We know that in time it must make its way ; and to know when or how concerns us as little as it probably concerns the author, who can very well afford to wait without much impatience.

AUGUSTE VACQUERIE

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### AUJOURD'HUI ET DEMAIN

1875

If there is one fact established beyond disproof with regard to the poetical character, one indisputable certainty set high and seated firm above all doubt or question in the eyes of all practical men by the consent of all authorities no less than by the authority of all experience from the days of Plato to our own, it is this : that the nature of poets is essentially and incurably incompetent to apprehend or to estimate aright the simplest practical matters of public life or polity. Wings they may have, but it is impossible that they should have feet to walk straight, eyes to see clear, hands to work hard on the common ground and in the common air of reality ; they are fit only, as we all know, to be crowned and expelled by the same hands, waved off and worshipped at due distance by the rational gratitude of their fellow-citizens. If for once in passing we might venture, in the teeth of a technical rule of logic, to assume as implied the converse of this proposition,

Which, as I take it, is a kind of puppy  
To the old dam, nonsense—

and yet it cannot of course be that ;

for worthy Plato,  
Who cannot err, he said so—

if, I say, we might for the moment assume that the truth of this theorem must involve the counter truth

that all men of proved incompetence and ineptitude for public service or national utility were poets (and some persons might think this as reasonable an article of faith as the original dogma that all poets were thus inept and incompetent), what a teeming and exuberant crop of Homers, Dantes, Shakespeares—the very greatest in their kind—would not the harvest of our own happy day have produced on all hands ! Of Miltons I say nothing ; the name of that political incompetent and representative dunce in all matters of national interest—a name which will always remain, or so long at least as it can be expected to remain at all, the perennial and proverbial type of poetic inefficiency for patriotic duties, the grand example and evidence to all time of the profound truth and wisdom of the verdict delivered on that score alike by philosophers and by practical men—that name might possibly suggest recollections not altogether in perfect harmony with the immediate argument. What a galaxy of great singers must, according to this theory, be shedding, even while we write, the mild lustre of its beneficent effulgence alike on England and on France ! Above all, if inconsequence, incoherence, incapacity for the management of affairs, be indeed the sovereign sign and the satisfying seal of poetic genius, what a dynasty of poets was that which exploded in a fetid fume of immortal ignominy, when the bladder of empire which had swollen for some twenty years of fame and shame burst once for all at Sedan, leaving behind it the savour of its end as of an example to be in due time imitated at Chislehurst, when the whole harvest of human scorn and historic infamy had been reaped and garnered, and the season at last was ripe for the emperor to go the way of the empire, dying the only natural death by the only inevitable consum-

mation of the system and the man ! *Qualis artifex pereo*, moaned the first Nero with the knife trembling at his throat ; and in this as in a few other points, if there were anything trustworthy in a theory which would identify poetic power with political impotence, the fugitive son of Agrippina might have found in the fugitive son of Hortense a mimic and a parodist.

Apologising to the memory of the Roman tyrant—who at least had not won his way to empire by the most execrable of all recorded perjuries, nor at the price of any more precious life than that of another emperor—for the suggestion of a parallel so unduly dishonourable even to the name of Nero, we may dismiss the counter proposition or supposition which we have called up to confront and to complete, by way of supplement or antithesis, the well-worn argument of poetic limitation or inadequacy. We have now to note the audacity with which a living poet of high place and lasting name has once more challenged, by act and not by word, the justice or trustworthiness of this Platonic doctrine. Never was it more haughtily and triumphantly impugned by any man in whom the poet was at one with the patriot than it has been for many years now of noble work by M. Auguste Vacquerie. It is without any sense of strangeness that we recognise in his latest book a daring outrage offered to the favourite tenet of philosophic or practical commentators on the nature and the place of poets. For the most noticeable point in this book is perhaps not the strength nor the grace nor the brilliance of its workmanship, the flash and thrust of a satire

whose keen wit

Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it,

and we see only the supple vigour and exquisite skill

of the fencer's wrist who dealt it ; not the high and tender ardour of spirit, the stern and strong desire of justice, a queen and mistress so ' bitterly beloved ' of the noblest only among men ; not the heroic passion and pity which fill and freshen every page of it with pure and fiery life ; for all these qualities we may suppose that even philosophers and politicians by profession might condescend to concede as possible to poets, out of the fulness of their candour and their grace ; it is, be it said with their leave or without, the solidity of good sense, the direct radiance of reason, which illuminates and welds together all parts of the building, all views laid open, all principles enforced. There is here nothing vague, windy, indecisive ; we are as far as may be from a land of dreams or shadows. It would be difficult to prove that philosophy was as little given as is poetry to the erection and colonisation of Cloudeuckootowns. At all events, no man of decent honesty and common insight, whether or not his own views or hopes may agree in the main or in detail with the ends and the means here advocated, can deny that they are practicable, comprehensible, consistent. Open the book and read at random ; look up whatever subject may especially attract you ; try what the author may have to say on any matter of immediate interest which it may please you to select from the various list of questions here weighed and handled. You may be a supporter of the penalty of death, a lover of limited or unlimited monarchy, even a wellwisher to clerical as opposed to national education ; you will not be able to say that the present antagonist of your opinions has here assailed them with loose or intemperate declamation, subjected them to other than a candid and cautious exposition, considered them by the light of any medium which might discolour or distort their natural hues and

outlines. In every case he cites to the bar not fancies, not consequences, not probabilities perceptible to his own mind's eye, but facts indisputable on either side, patent, flagrant, obvious. You may not accept the necessity of his inferences, but you cannot impeach the validity of his premisses. From first to last he keeps before the reader's eye two primal and final questions. Are these things so or not? And if they be, are they good or bad, just or unjust? Fact, evidence, reason, righteousness, these are the authorities to which he appeals, the touchstones which he applies to the matter in hand, the tests to which he brings it for acceptance or rejection; these, and by no means sentiment, theory, passion, or presumption. Not till it has been thus tried and tested does he bring to bear upon the question at issue the forces of his earnest eloquence or his keen and fiery play of wit.

If there is any one class of writers to whom it is generally admitted that the attribution of practical good sense would be absurd, it is the hapless and profitless class of poets; if there is any one political party in Europe to whom it is habitually and contemptuously refused by the common cry of their opponents, it is the republican or radical party in France. On this double account especially I have been careful first of all to note the presence and predominance of this priceless quality of reason throughout the new work of one of the purest republicans and one of the most fervent poets of this age or of any. From such an one, if there were a grain of truth or sense in the cuckoo's catchword of conventional objection, we might have looked for mere ardent and vacuous effusion of spirit and speech, protests and outcries of hysterical improvisation, shrieks of wrath broken by sobs of sensibility, vague lyric appeals to abstract



principle, shrill tragic indictment of things disagreeable ; and it is cruelly indelicate and inconsiderate on the author's part to have shown us nothing of the kind, but in place of these a power to see clearly and grasp firmly at once the root and the result, the conditions and the issues of each national or social problem which it has been his office to demonstrate or discuss. The weight and edge of his trenchant and pungent style, the point and balance of his vivid and virile prose, which may be likened for these great qualities rather to the verse of Dryden than to any other or humbler parallel I can find in English literature, are never used but to the direct end wanted, in swift and loyal service of the immediate need. This vital and luminous property of language, here applied to the gravest matters of present import, had found as full a scope before in the bright sharp wisdom and wit of *Profils et Grimaces*, in the incisive dramatic force and vigorous variety of *Les Miettes de l'Histoire* ; and from the author of those admirable books, so full of fresh and solid food for thought and emotion, even critics averse from his views and incredulous of his creed might perhaps allow that some display of practical and serviceable faculty might be expected on this ground also ; but a reference to his poems would doubtless suffice to dispel from the mind of any serious man all fear to find in the lyrist and dramatist a serious or dangerous antagonist on any political topic. Each leaf in his laurel might be invoked in separate witness of the wearer's inability to deserve a civic as well as a poetic crown ; for no forehead could of course be wide enough to support the two ; and the singer's wreath worn from his youth upwards by the present claimant of the citizen's is thick and fresh enough of foliage to shadow as high a head and invest as broad a brow as ever was content

with one. His first poems I know but by excerpts ; enough only to show the writer's early cunning and mastery of supple and vigorous verse, pliant to his various moods of mind and docile to his young strength of hand ; his sureness and loftiness of aim, his loyal ardour and clear-sighted ambition. His face was set from the first towards only the high places of song, but his foot from the first was trained in more than one racecourse to run as the racers of old for the prize of a double goal. He led forward *Antigone* on the modern stage arrayed, not after the fashion of Racine, but after the fashion of Sophocles ; not a choral fold of the marble verse disturbed, not a tress astray from the funereal fillet of her hair. Side by side with the holy figure revived and reclothed with the glory of song by this august and serene labour of love, he let loose *Tragaldabas*, unmuzzled and uncombed, on the same astonished boards, to be hooted at by nameless throats and applauded by the noblest hands then working in the same wide field. This compound product of broad fantastic farce and graceful romantic intrigue may either recall those early children of Shakespeare's genius begotten by strong-limbed humour on lyric fancy, or suggest what might be the modern equivalent of a Greek satyric drama, had we some ampler model to observe, some more potent example to study, than the one lonely little offspring of the gayer genius of Euripides, known here under the auspices of a far different poet from its father as the fosterchild of Shelley. In the comic and romantic poem which gives us the broad bright smile of his young genius, Auguste Vacquerie may perhaps, for aught we can tell, have shown as much of radical affinity to the spirit of an ancient Greek as in his chaste and severe engraving from the outline of Sophocles. Certain it is that the

admixture of rough and loud burlesque, now with graver humour and now with tender and radiant interludes of romance, would have deserved the applause of any audience accustomed to appreciate the fine and potent infusion of one excellence with another, which is the special note of poetic comedy in its hours of fullest freedom. The position of *Élisco*, containing as it does the very core and kernel of the deeper humour of the poem, could only have been conceived, as the scene in which he pleads with *Tragaldabas* to spare his own precious life, and resist for his friends' and country's sake all temptations to the high-souled suicide of a noble nature grown weary of men's misconception, could only have been carried through by a comic poet of fresh and rare genius in that subtler kind which, as *Théophile Gautier* observed of this very part, has something of a sorrowful secret meaning or moral in its mirth. His adaptation of *Falstaff* to the French stage is known to me only by *Gautier's* admirable prologue ; but I would fain hope against hope that it may have done more justice than the verdict of *Victor Hugo* has shown to the sunnier and less seamy side of *Falstaff's* moral nature. The great master who has fought all his life long against capital punishment has summed up against the fat immortal in the very tone and spirit of a hanging judge of old ; the voice in which he passes sentence has the accent of *Jeffreys* rather than of *Gascoigne*. I will not undertake to vindicate for *Falstaff* the possession of every virtue—of probity, for example, and chastity ; but, to say nothing of that placid presence of mind and passivity of cynic courage which if no spur of honour could excite yet no stroke of danger could disturb, it is unaccountable to me how any student should be able to overlook or to ignore the care taken by *Shakespeare* to bring at last into full

relief those true and tender elements mixed into the old knight's nature which caused his heart to break, not at the fall of his fortunes, but at the unkindness of his friend ('the king has killed his heart'), and which so bound to him in life and death the hearts of his poor rascally followers that Bardolph, when 'the fuel was gone that maintained that fire,' could but wish he 'were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell.' It cannot be allowed that 'the dynasty of good sense, inaugurated in Panurge, continued in Sancho Panza, goes wrong and miscarries in Falstaff'; who is at least cleaner than the henchman of Pantagruel, and fully as constant as the squire of Quixote. Probably, when the master wrote this, his mind was running less on the follower of Prince Hal than on Trimalchio and his bastard brood, the pimps who kept the door and the lackeys who swept the stage for the murderous mountebanks of the Lower Empire.

Of Auguste Vacquerie's later plays, I have only time to choose two for a passing mention, and give a brief word of recognition to the keen-edged grace and subtle radiance of thought and art which fill the little comic poem of *Souvent Homme Varié*, to the depth and delicacy of noble passion which inform the inward and spiritual tragedy set forth under so new, so sad, and so grand a symbol in the catastrophe of *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*; a play which in the purely ideal impression of its close, the subordination of external to internal effect in the process of the scene to its final completion in a natural and inevitable yet sudden and artistic surprise, may recall the incomparable consummation of Ford's *Broken Heart*. It may be worth reflection as well as remark that Victor Hugo and his noblest pupil—pupil in no servile but only a filial sense, worthy of elder and younger poet alike—should

have been the two chief or only poets of our age to do honour to the high tradition of honour embodied in the claims and duties of long descent, to celebrate with a lofty sympathy the heroism of that old loyalty which can bear no stain on its blazon but of blood—the same flower of aristocracy at its highest and best ; that the time should find none but the lips of republicans, confessors, and martyrs of the democratic principle which alone can show now its golden book of knights and heroes, champions of an actual crusade and peers of a present chivalry as noble as and more fruitful than the past, to set forth the praise of the ancient patrician faith in our fathers which was the root of so proud a virtue, so tender a sense of shame, so haughty a rule of right ; while from court poets of duly insular and monarchical opinions we get but the thin vixenish echo of a petty, trite, and rather vulgar satire or sermon on family prejudice and pride, spiced with the stale and sterile commonplaces of cheap invective or querulous ridicule with which a thin and threadbare middle-class Liberalism was long since free to denounce or deprecate in a plaintive or an acrid key the pride and reserve of an aristocracy whose notice or alliance, if accorded, was sure to sweeten the most acid humours of an ignoble discontent. Not from official royalists and conservative reformers of this type may we look for aught that might emulate the scene of the portraits in *Hernani* or that of the empty grave made ready for other than a bodily occupant in *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*.

The clear terse excellence of a style in which weight and point are alike noticeable is in all the work of Auguste Vacquerie equally fit for prompt and perfect service to the poet's thought or purpose, whether this be grave or light, of general or of immediate import ;

and the fine instinct of construction which retains the interest of the student while it sustains the harmony of the design seems to me more wholly adequate to the task required of it in these latter plays than even in the recast form of *Tragaldabas*. The natural skill of the artist's hand is now in better training, its fruit more ripe and solid from the flawless core to the speckless rind of the poem. The attraction of direct and progressive effect, in which perhaps the smallest part is that due to the creation and satisfaction of suspense and surprise, is impaired by no lapse or aberration from the straight dramatic way. This good gift is not less conspicuous in each of the brief tragic poems which stand out like dark blossoms of aconite or poppy among the green pasture-lands and golden harvest-fields of that noble book of song called *Mes Premières Années de Paris*. In one of these, the subtlest perhaps in motive, it should be noted with what an intuitive skill the poet has averted from his work all pretext for the charge of imitation to which the scheme, in less vigorous hands, would surely have made it liable; so that a double catastrophe which on one side recalls *Angelo*, on the other *La Coupe et les Lèvres*, becomes by the act of combination original, and able to hold its own above any suspicion of undue debt either to Hugo or to Musset. These little tragedies, for closeness of thought and heat of action or emotion, for power of condensed and compressed passion, are best comparable with the studies of Mr. Browning in the same form of art; there is something of a kindred force and correspondence of aims and powers in the passionate and reflective work of the French and the English poet, in the pensive and fiery concentration which is a distinctive note of the genius of either. This fusion of tragic and philosophic faculty is one chief

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test of ability to deal with the high resources and strange secrets of dramatic art ; without it a writer may be a poet, a playwright, a student of character, but not even in promise or in presage a dramatist.

In the same book all readers competent to weigh French verse with English will not fail to estimate aright the strength and cunning of hand with which the *Accession of Henry the Fifth* has been adapted from Shakespeare. The masterly transfusion into a new tongue of the famous scene between the prince and his dying father attains here and there to a fidelity and delicacy of touch hardly less than miraculous ; and the pliant vigour of the verse recalls in its force and subtlety of rendering the matchless prose version of the friend whose 'Titanic labour in the 'giant's field' of Shakespeare added a fresh lustre even to the name of his father, and to whose memory Auguste Vacquerie has in his present book paid the tribute of a brother now three times bereft. Time and space forbid me here to take note of so much as a tithe of the high qualities which mark his other poems ; to dwell on their wit, fancy, tenderness, energy, their free and various forces and universal spirit of life. Never was critical poetry more fine of edge, more bright and keen in swordplay, than in the lyrical interludes of satire and praise ; never were songs of love or sorrow more tender or fiery than here. The very crown and jewel of the whole book is to my thinking the splendid and ardent poem beginning

Oh ! quand, du bord du bois où, dans l'épais feuillage.

More perfect passion was never molten into more burning melody ; no finer cast of the very form and feature of supreme desire was ever taken in words, or came forth more full and faultless in mould from the

inmost furnace of sense and song, fed with memories and fancies as rich as the materials flung into Cellini's when he cast the Perseus with as masterly and as fervent a hand. And of the poems laid as funeral flowers on unforgotten graves—on that one above all made imperishable in all memories for ever, which hides the two lovely and undivided lives whose union allied the name of this poet to that of his mighty master in song—what more and what less than this can be said? that even after the fourth book of the *Contemplations* we may read them with no subsidence of sorrowful and sublime delight in the power of poetry to sharpen at once and soften the keenest edge of sympathy by possession at once and exaltation of the spirit.

That such a man should have written such a book as he has here given us is of itself a commentary of sufficient significance on the doctrine which would warn off all poets from the ground of practical service to the state. The 'high heart which took up the challenge of destiny,'

Trouvant la chute belle et le malheur propice,

beats here and burns through every line; and those immortal words of high and fatherly acknowledgment which saluted the dawn of a long and voluntary exile, so nobly shared and sustained, may now be read once more with the sense of a fresh interest and meaning in them. Another instalment has been paid of the great debt due from a faithful son to the Mother-land; a debt more vast than was exacted of her by the full-blown rapacity of a conqueror, but paid as readily to a creditor how different from hers! There is not a page of this book inapt to serve as a weapon of attack or defence against her inner and most deadly foes;



not a word which carries with it no weight of strenuous and helpful service. Next time it should be the poet's turn to speak, and reiterate once more the perfect and full disproof of the fallacy which would divide by an impassable frontier his office from the patriot's. We have in our hands a noble present proof how true and good a patriot may be found and honoured in the poet ; and though assuredly we need no further evidence on the part of Auguste Vacquerie, yet we trust before long to receive fresh confirmation of the certitude, how true and high a poet may survive and be crowned in the patriot.

## AUGUSTE VACQUERIE

FORMOSA, 1883

THERE is nothing which makes us so keenly realise the unapproachable greatness of the author of *Othello* as the recollection of the fact that the author of *The Duchess of Malfy* was not the greatest tragic poet of his generation. There is nothing which brings so vividly before us the unapproachable greatness of the author of *Ruy Blas* as the recognition of the fact that there is yet among us a greater tragic poet than the author of *Formosa*. We know nothing of any personal relation between Shakespeare and Webster ; but the spiritual relation between the genius of the one poet and the genius of the other has some evident and important points in common with that between Victor Hugo and the most illustrious of all his admirers and disciples. Auguste Vacquerie has always shown, by the practical evidence of his workmanship, the sincerity of his expressed conviction—' Qu'on n'imitait Hugo qu'en ne l'imitant pas ' ; and Webster in like manner proved himself a disciple of Shakespeare by abstinence from such reproduction of his manner as we find, for instance, in the two tragedies of the younger Hemings, a playwright of real but servile talent. In original force and mastery, in terse and trenchant concision of style, in flashes of pathos and bursts of rolling music, the voice and hand of Vacquerie recall the voice and hand of Webster ; but there is more sunlight in the world of his creation, more variety in the magic of his

touch. He too might have been, had it pleased him, 'the most tragic of poets' in his time; we may doubt whether Webster, had it pleased him, could have been otherwise. But, difficult as it naturally may be for men to recognise that high original genius is compatible with astonishing variety of energies and flexibility of powers, it must ultimately prove impossible that the distinction of Vacquerie's position as a journalist, his eminence as a critic, his services as a politician and his honours as a patriot, should be allowed to eclipse the greatness of his quality as a poet. No man but Victor Hugo has shown himself greater, if so great, since the days of the Greek dramatists, at once in lyric and in tragic verse. For the great dramatists of England never tried their wings in lyric poetry except for the shortest of possible flights: and the first of English lyrists made his mark but once in tragedy; for *Hellas* and *Prometheus Unbound* have little other than a lyrical existence, lying almost as far outside the pale of Æschylean as of Shakespearian drama. But Vacquerie, eminent and triumphant alike in fantastic and in realistic studies, in the severest line of tragedy and the most romantic form of comedy, has shown by many a memorable instance his right to claim a high station in the front rank of living lyrists. Students of the future will surely find it hard to realise that this illustrious and high-souled poet was also the most brilliant and the most indefatigable of journalists and critics, political and literary; the swiftest, strongest, gracefulest of swordsmen in the daily strife of so many glorious years.

It is well known that the poem which has recently added another flower to the many-coloured crown of his fame belongs by date of birth to that most glorious period of a most noble life, when its author was the

companion, in exile and in honour, of the master to whom all that life has been as loyal as to the faith and principle accepted and obeyed by both with equal perfection of loyalty. For many years this lofty and pathetic work has awaited the time of triumph which has come for it at last amid the unanimous applause of the one great city in which art and poetry are held in as high honour and esteem as worthy of rational interest as any passing matter of practical politics.

But a poem of such an order appeals not only to the audience of one city, to the readers of one country, though that city be Paris and that country France ; it is born with wings to pass all frontiers, with a voice to reach all hearts ; if not amenable to foreign judgment, it is no whit the less appreciable by foreign admiration. The liberties taken with English history are perhaps a little graver than those allowed himself by Shakespeare, certainly a little lighter than those allowed himself by Hugo. The invention of an imaginary third claimant to the throne at the moment of the final grapple for life between the Houses of York and Lancaster would scarcely have seemed permissible to an English poet ; but the ingenuity and plausibility with which this contrivance is managed might well be held of themselves to justify a licence which is more than justified by the magnificent effect and impression of the results attained. The high figure of the king-maker Warwick stands out in more lifelike and decisive relief than was given to it by Shakespeare or Marlowe. No more superb contrast was ever shown on the stage than here between his lofty chivalry and the abject egotism of the patronised pretender ; no lovelier distinction was ever drawn by a poet's loving imagination than that which sets off against each other the graver and the more girlish heroine. That sympathy with all noble emotion which

informs the whole work of Auguste Vacquerie finds most vivid and impressive illustration in the fact that three characters out of the four on which the action of this play depends are very types of heroism or sweetness. No dramatic or other poem has ever given us two fairer figures in finer contrast than those of the rival friends. Fletcher, of all our dramatists the most addicted to such effects, has never achieved in this his favourite line of study so beautiful and brilliant a success. Such a triumph of tragic art as the further contrast between the treasonous duke and the chivalrous king-maker lies yet further beyond comparison with any similar attempt of the same poet. To find a parallel for this we must look higher than all other moderns; we must turn once again to the types of Eiradnus and of Ratbert.

The superb and subtle simplicity of structure, the solid and vivid harmony of verse, it would need a hand as skilful and as strong as the poet's to describe or commend aright. Such universal applause has already acclaimed, in the great fourth scene of the third act, one of the most original, most subtle, and most passionate triumphs of dramatic poetry, that one voice more in the chorus of praise can be worth little save in evidence of gratitude and goodwill. But it may be remarked that in this play the noblest parts are given to the women by a poet who, in *Jean Baudry* and *Les Funérailles de l'Honneur*, has given to his male actors the loftiest duties to discharge in the cause of honour and self-sacrifice. Satire or sentiment might suggest that this explains or is explained by the fact of its being written in verse; a fact to be thankfully and rejoicingly accepted by those who can hardly bring themselves to admit that even the prose of *Marie Tudor* is quite worth the verse of *Marion de Lorme*, and to

whom on the same account *Tragaldabas* yields even more pleasure than *Le Fils*. In any case, such readers may be permitted to congratulate themselves that the higher and more natural form of tragic expression has been chosen for a play which contains two such types of womanhood. In the year 1820, Shelley, desiring to pay the highest possible compliment, said of a friend that she was 'like one of Shakespeare's women'; in 1883 he might have said, like one of Vacquerie's.